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Around the Jetties

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An Anglers Newsletter

“The fisherman homeward bound with fish in his bag is as complete a man as he wants to be. The empty handed angler usually maintains that it was a wonderful day in any case, but a couple of fish would have helped.”

From “Freshwater Fighting Fish” by Vic McCristal published 1964

Editorial

The issue of increased funding for the employment of Fisheries Officers has added significance for estuaries where commercial netting continues, as the use of funds for ongoing employment of Fisheries Officers, means less funds are available for the actual buyback of commercial licences. A key to reducing the number of commercial fishermen in the Gippsland Lakes from 32 in the mid nineties to ten today was the ability for a generous buy back to be funded from the recreational anglers licence fees, and therefore was cost negative for the Government of the day. Associated with this decision is the membership of the unidentified members of the Recreational Grants Working Group who made the decision, and the silence of VRFish on a decision that will have wide ranging long term effects on the future of recreational fishing resources in this state. This decision means fewer funds for research, restocking, small grants, and the buy back of commercial licences. This is a decision that is hardly in the interest of recreational anglers in this state. Finally recreational anglers may wonder whether the increased funding of Fisheries Officers falls within the coalition recreational fishing policy which states- “The coalition would reinvest all revenue gained from fishing licences back into the recreational fishing industry along with \$4m over four years for the Recreational Fishing Grants Program.”

Funding Fisheries Officers from Anglers Licence Fees

This issue was raised in the last edition of Around the Jetties when it was revealed that the Recreational Grants Fishing Group had allocated almost \$1million additional dollars to the employment of six Fisheries Officers from the Recreational Licence Trust Fund. This brought the funding of Recreational Fisheries Officers annually to a total of \$1.95 million or 30% of the total funds derived from licence fees. Many anglers I have spoken to, regard this use of licence fees as questionable. It also needs to be stated that this decision by the Recreational Grants Working Group is an ongoing commitment, because it involves the employment of 13 Fisheries Officers. This in turn amounts to a reduction of available licence funds for restocking, research and facilities, which was the basis of introducing a General Angling Licence. Anglers have always supported the need for more Fisheries Officers but this is a recognised charge on the fisheries budget. There is an inherent danger that Fisheries Victoria by initiating this use of anglers licence fees for this purpose may lose considerable angler support, and this would be most regrettable, as in recent years recreational anglers have worked closely with Fisheries Victoria and this is an important partnership.

In the last newsletter I asked for views of readers, and I provide two letters of a number that were received with the names withheld as indicated previously.

Dear Lynton

At a recent meeting of our angling club, our secretary tabled your newsletter "Around the Jetties" No 44.

I wish to express my concern at the provision of funding to both Fisheries and Parks Victoria for the benefit of recreational angling, but for which the expenditure is not fully explained.

I am particularly concerned at the way money from the RFL Trust Account is used. Money for employment of RFO's should come from Fisheries, not this account.

I would like to see the new State Government show leadership and investigate the way these funds are used and accounted for.

Yours sincerely. (Name supplied)

And

Dear Lynton

After receiving "Around the Jetties" 43 and 44, I feel I must express my concern at the large amounts of funding to both Fisheries (For employment of RFO's) and Parks Victoria (for Marine Parks) that is not properly accounted for.

I totally agree that we need more Recreational Fisheries Officers but funded by Fisheries and **NOT** anglers licence fees. Now with a change in State Government, we should pressure the new Government to be open and transparent and make available documentation to show where the funds have been spent. Perhaps an audit is needed.

Congratulations on bringing this information and figures to the notice of recreational anglers.

Keep up the good work.

Keen reader of "Around the Jetties." (Name Supplied)

There were a number of phone calls indicating concern, and in some cases expressing anger at this use of licence funds. There was considerable concern at the unidentified Fishing Grants Working party allocating funds, and the recreational anglers who provided the funds having no knowledge of the members of this working party. Finally a couple of callers suggested this was a breach of the implied agreement regarding use of funds when the General Angling Licence was introduced.

Editor

I think recreational anglers who have contacted me are disappointed with the increase of almost \$1 million to Fisheries Victoria to employ six more Recreational Fisheries Officers. This is an allocation of almost \$2 million by a group of faceless people who are not accountable to the recreational angling fraternity, who through their licence fees supply these funds. Finally when I spoke to a person associated with the Recreational Anglers Licence Fund, he agreed that taking funds for one purpose simply meant fewer funds for other needs.

Recreational anglers may well give this some thought. A number of callers associated the increase in funding for compliance officers with concern at the use of Trust Funds to undertake research into the stocking of Lake Tyers with Eastern King Prawns. Several anglers expressed concern at VRFish's silence on this issue.

I did not have a call from any reader who supported either funding.

Mallacoota Report



I was talking to Frank Milito who runs East Gippsland Charters following the final of the Bream Classic held at Mallacoota, (19th and 20th March) and Frank was suggesting the fishing at Mallacoota was excellent. The winning team in the classic weighed in five bream on successive days that went 5.6kgs total bag on both days. Of course this was catch and release and the results endorsed the recent comments of Frank as to the fishing in this water. The fish numbers according to Frank are confirmed on his Fish Finder and as a result he suggests the numbers of anglers fishing the Mallacoota waters are similar to what it was in the Gippsland Lakes 25 years ago. A couple of interesting

observations he made were that a number of dusky flathead when caught disgorged small bream, and he wondered how important this was in the food chain of the dusky flathead, and the effect if any on bream populations. I had never heard this issue being raised as possibly having an effect on the black bream fish population in an estuary previously. The other matter that he commented on was the possibility of yellow fin bream and black bream hybridising, and this was evidently being discussed amongst a number of anglers who believed they had caught a hybridised bream.

Editor

The following comment on the issue of the effect of dusky flathead eating small bream was from an email of the late Peter Spehr (24 February 2010). Peter wrote in this newsletter as the “Concerned Angler prior to his passing “I have seen some interesting contents in Dusky Flathead stomachs before my catch and release days. I have no doubt that small bream feature in the food chain for many species. One year there was a bloom of 20-cent size flounder and every flatty was gorging on them. I also caught a mid 90cm dusky flathead one evening and it regurgitated a 7” inch black bream. It made an interesting photo. We have to accept that bigger fish will eat little fish, but if there is a good enough spawning enough quality fish will get through.”

On the matter of hybridisation raised by Frank, S.J. Rowland undertook a study in 1984 on the hybridisation between black bream and yellow fin bream for the School of Biological Sciences, Macquarie University NSW. He found that both the black bream and the yellow fin bream are mainly caught in estuaries although the yellow fin is also taken from beaches and rocky headlands. Yellow fin are found between Townsville and the Gippsland Lakes whilst black bream can be found from the Myall Lakes in NSW to Shark Bay in Western Australia. Consequently the species overlap in the Mallacoota Inlet as well as the Gippsland Lakes. Bream were sampled using gill and seine nets at a number of locations stretching from the Myall Lakes to the Gippsland Lakes however Mallacoota Inlet was not included in the sampling. This study-recognised hybridisation was taking place, however it mainly occurred where the estuary was closed. A 2010 study in NSW of 565 adult bream from 25 estuaries spanning the range of both species found hybrids were widespread occurring in 68% of estuaries. The recent East Gippsland Fisheries Management Plan (October 2010) states, “these two species are morphologically very similar and are known to hybridise in some areas where they coexist.” There is no doubt that black bream and yellow fin bream hybridise and it would seem likely that this is taking place in Mallacoota Inlet; however there does seem to be more likelihood of hybridisation occurring where an estuary is closed. The NSW study by Gray, West, Roberts and Ayre of 2010 states “This study highlights the underemphasized importance of estuaries as sites of hybridisation for species.”

It would seem the question of hybridisation of bream is now an acknowledged fact but like many aspects of recreational fishing, it needs far more study.

When was the Start of the Decline in Black Bream stocks in the Gippsland Lakes?

In a paper written by the late Dunbavin Butcher, Senior Biologist of the Fisheries and Game Department in 1945 entitled “Conservation of the Bream Fishery he stated “ the position of the bream fishery in Victoria particularly the Gippsland Lakes has been causing some concern for a considerable time.” and from 1913 onwards the “the available statistics may be used and these indicate the commercial catch of bream, has been declining steadily, following the build up to the greatest catch in 1919.” It was interesting this catch in 1919 was largely a one off, and the result of floods and the commercial fishermen’s ability to capitalize on such a natural occurrence. (The 1919 Commercial Catch of bream in the Gippsland Lakes was 955,000lbs or 446 Tons.)



Simon Conran and Patrick Coutin, from the Victorian Fisheries Research Institute, Queenscliff, undertook a survey of recreational fishing in the Gippsland Lakes in 1995. This study involved aerial surveys of anglers as well as creel surveys. Most anglers 73% targeted black bream with 16% of anglers being non-specific about targeting a species, whilst 6% of anglers targeted King George whiting.

The report states that since the previous survey by Hall and Macdonald (1985) mean catch rates for all species have declined by 52%. This decrease in recreational catch rates is consistent with the

66% decline in the commercial catch rates of black bream. Commercial catches of black bream had declined by 60% from 435 tonnes in 1983/4 to 172 tonnes in 1992/3. The following statement in this report is almost identical with the 1945 report when it says “**this decline increases the concern for the state of bream stocks in the Gippsland Lake.**”

Now the statement of Dunbavin Butcher in 1945 and the 1995 study should be compared with the situation today, where the commercial catch of black bream is a mere 36 tonnes. If the commercial catch according to the scientists was of concern in 1992/3 when it was 172 tonnes how much greater concern should Fisheries Victoria and scientists have when the commercial catch has declined to 36 tonnes? In 1992/3 over 50% of bank anglers were unsuccessful when interviewed whilst more than 50% of boat anglers had the very low catch rate of 0.2 fish per hour. That is 5 hours fishing for each fish caught.

In the entire report dusky flathead does not receive a single mention which would seem to indicate that at this time (1995) few of the species were targeted or they were not thought to be a sporting species.█

In recent times in the Gippsland Lakes we have seen a small explosion in dusky flathead numbers and in 2005/6 the commercial catch was 48 tonnes. Since that date the commercial catch has declined every year, and in the most recent statistics the catch dropped from 20 tonnes to 14 tonnes, and if this trend continues that wonderful species the dusky flathead will only be a memory for both recreational anglers and commercial fishermen of the Gippsland Lakes.█

I would again draw readers' attention to a statement from the Labour Party at the time of the November state election on the issue of the decline of black bream and this was published in Around the Jetties Issue 42 January 2011.

“Available scientific evidence does not suggest any significant decline in black bream abundance in any of the estuaries of East Gippsland. We support a sustainable commercial fishery in the Gippsland Lakes and believe we have the right balance in terms of recreational and commercial fishing.”

It does seem that the dramatic decline of black bream in the Gippsland Lakes is almost totally denied in the minds of many, and until there is a realisation of the true status of fish stocks in the Gippsland Lakes by the public generally, then we will continue to hear despite the evidence, the suggestion that there has been no decline in black bream stocks in the Gippsland Lakes. Agreeing that a problem exists might be the first step to taking action to seek a resolution of this long term decline in black bream stocks in the Gippsland Lakes, and the five year consecutive decline in dusky flathead.



Welcome to New Readers

In January I wrote to Peter Walsh, Minister for Agriculture and Food Security in the new Government, and provided a copy of Around the Jetties for the new Minister. The following letter was received on the 11th March “Dear Mr Barr

I welcome your commitment and efforts in communicating information about recreational fishing and Victoria's fisheries, including the findings of the scientific studies prepared by the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Fisheries Victoria division to a wider audience.

I would be most grateful if you could send copies of your newsletter to me and also to my Parliamentary Secretary for Primary Industries, Mr Bill Sykes, who will be assisting me on matters regarding recreational fishing.

I am pleased to confirm the new Victorian Governments commitment to ensure that the community's fisheries are appropriately managed and to provide new opportunities for recreational fishing across regional Victoria. I encourage you to work closely with DPI's Fisheries Victoria staff in this regard.

I look forward to working with the recreational fishing community,

Yours sincerely

Peter Walsh MLA

Minister for Agriculture and Food Security.”

Editor

We certainly welcome the Minister and Dr Sykes as readers of Around the Jetties and it is hoped this publication might inform the Minister of anglers concerns and aspirations as well as providing information in an easily readable form from a variety of sources.

Tracks into Lake Tyers and Parks Victoria's Report

Readers of this newsletter will be aware of the steps taken to ensure tracks into Lake Tyers are kept open and maintained to ensure shore anglers have access to this wonderful water. It also needs to be pointed out that many shore anglers are older members of our community who like to take a chair down to the waters edge to sit and fish. On Monday the 24th of February John Harrison local research angler and member of Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club led a small group including Chris Rose Regional Manager, Will McCutcheon Chief Ranger, and Hayley Menheere, Project Officer of Parks Victoria together with Christopher Collins, CEO of VRFish and myself on a tour of tracks on the east side of Lake Tyers. This was an attempt to ensure that Parks Victoria was aware of the needs of anglers in this area, and that tracks were maintained and not closed without close

consultation with anglers. After almost a full day of travelling these tracks and discussing the issues involved Parks Victoria Regional Manager Chris Rose wrote-“will be in touch shortly” to put some proposals “that reduce access less than the original proposals.”

Since then I received this note on the 13th March from Jacquie and Len Axen readers of this newsletter and they raise another issue. They write “recent comments concerning tracks in and around Lake Tyers strike a chord with bird observers as well. Jacquie and I completed a Hooded Plover survey for Birds Australia last November, from the Mueller River to Lake Tyers. We were disappointed to see the proliferation of tracks around the Glasshouse and the unauthorised camping and degrading of the area. Of particular concern to us were the well-established camps on the shoreline at the Glasshouse with one family armed with crossbows. Methinks Sambar deer were in their sights, which is another issue for Parks Victoria and the DSE to grapple with.”

On the 4th of April and John Harrison and I received a copy of a letter sent by the Parks Victoria Eastern Manager to Christopher Collins Executive Officer of VRFish. Readers can draw their own assessments on what has been achieved.

Cameron’s No2 Track,

Instead of total closure, this 2.7km track will be closed in the last 250 metres to the water, which allows pedestrian access down a steep embankment.

Ironbark Track

Instead of the closure of the 700 metre track, Parks Victoria proposes closure of this track 100 metres short of the current car park area with retention of pedestrian access to the water. Work will be undertaken to provide a low key pedestrian access to the water. Parks Victoria notes that indigenous artefacts are to be found in this area and vehicle traffic has the potential to cause erosion and lead to loss of indigenous material.



Suzie Q or Rough Track

This is an informal track that has grown into a network of tracks that provide access to a number of points on the lake shore. The cultural values in this area according to Parks Victoria are significant and mitigate against any earthworks. Parks Victoria intends to further discuss this area with stakeholders and interest groups. In the meantime no further work will be undertaken to either reinforce or remove the intended closures.

See photo left

Use of Rocks

The use of large rocks to control vehicle access will remain, as this treatment was a result of formal negotiations with Aboriginal representatives.

Readers might remember both John Harrison and I felt the use of large boulders was most inappropriate for a number of reasons.



Other sites

The letter noted there were other sites where improvements could be made for visitors including anglers. These include the Trident Arm and perhaps the Fisheries Grants program may be capable of being used for potential funding. There is also a need to identify suitable sites for a properly established camping area,

Editor

The closure of the Suzie Q track will ultimately mean that the access to the Pile Bay area for shore anglers will be denied. By the way I have a Parks Victoria map dated February 2010 giving details of how park users may use the Suzie Q track to gain access to Pile Bay and informal camping. Access for the aged or infirm on other tracks has not been addressed and this also means limitations on angler access. A major problem is lack of funding, but even where Parks Victoria has undertaken work such as Long Point, Crystal Bay and Blackfellows

Arm, steps rather than ramps have been used, and in some cases (Pile Bay) parking is almost non-existent, while walking tracks to the water have been closed. It is great to see some work being undertaken but in many cases the result could be more user friendly with consultation with anglers. Also of concern is the state of the tracks, and this letter has not committed Parks Victoria to any track maintenance. Given that Lake Tyers has been declared a Fishing Reserve perhaps some formal discussions with anglers should be part of any process of development. As an observer there does not seem to be any limitation on vehicle access to the waters edge or camping in the Aboriginal Trust area.

Diarist Bob McNeill reports on Lake Tyers.

Readers will now be aware that Bob is a Diarist for Fisheries Victoria and provides regular reports on his angling in this lake. Bob fishes early on Tuesday and Friday mornings and can be seen launching his boat before daylight at the No2 ramp and generally fishes between 6.00am and 10.00am. This report covers the period from the 14th of January to the 18th March 2011. In recent times he has largely targeted dusky flathead with live mullet as the preferred bait however his catch is now starting to include black bream mainly taken on local prawn. Bob has in this period mainly fished the main lake, and in the period he reported catching 135 dusky flathead with the largest fish being 59cms. This statistic again reinforces the concern of many anglers and fisheries scientists at the lack of large flathead in the lake, remembering that dusky flathead do not reach full maturity until they reach 56cms. (NSW Research Gray and Barnes 2008). This concern at the lack of large flathead was noted in the 2011 Angler Diary Report of Selected Victorian Waters reported on in Around the Jetties 44, when the fisheries scientist authors suggested "dusky flathead populations should continue to be closely monitored in Lake Tyers and Mallacoota Inlet."

Readers would obviously see the importance of this diary report of Bob McNeill given the current concerns of fisheries scientists. This also reinforces the need for anglers to return all large flathead as they are the important breeding stock upon which this species relies and according to the NSW study, these large fish could provide over 2,000,000 eggs per fish in a season. Bob noted that the number of small flathead that is under 35cms has declined in the past month. In this period Bob has caught 36 black bream (12 undersize) with most bream 32-36cms in length, and most were caught in the latter part of this fishing period. Bob reports that he has boated 14 tailor with between 2 and 6 biting through the line on each trip. He raises the same question that was raised previously in this publication namely, how many small bream resulting from last seasons prolific spawning of black bream have been taken by this species. During this month Bob also caught 2 snapper one of which was a 36cm fish. All bream were caught on local prawn, as were the two snapper.



Editor

This was a most comprehensive report and provides a wonderful picture of the results achieved by one of the lakes best anglers. This is an example of an angler providing information to scientists and this information is providing cost effective analysis of fish species in our recreational fishing waters.

The Neglected Tailor

In Bob McNeill's report he referred to tailor, indicating he landed 14 which were duly reported in his Anglers Diary, however his line was cut by these fish several times on each trip. Of course one must remember that Bob like many of us older recreational anglers was using live mullet as our primary bait for dusky flathead and this is ready made for the tailor by catch.

T.C.Roughley's book Fish and Fisheries of Australia provides a wonderful pen picture of tailor, which is well worth reporting. He writes-

"The tailor subsists almost exclusively on a fish diet and consumes great quantities of such surface swimming fish as herrings, pilchards, sprats, anchovies, mackerel, mullet, hardyheads- yes, and tailor. Almost anything in the way of fish food seems to be welcome in its larder.

When freshly caught the tailor is a fish of fine edible quality; its flesh is white, tender, and of delicate flavour. When smoked it is delicious and there are few, if any, fish in Australian waters to surpass it when thus treated."

The comment by Roughly in his book regarding the diet of the tailor probably endorses the fact that the tailor would have some impact on the young bream, as has been noted by correspondents to this newsletter. Tailor have always been part of the charm of East Gippsland estuaries. Some twenty years ago I recall reading in the Sun Newspaper that restaurant owner fishing writer and top recreational angler Geoff Brooks writing and praising the fighting qualities of the 2-3lb tailor of Lake Tyers, and further he indicated that he was undertaking a trip to Tyers to target this species. I would think that few anglers today target this species for its fighting qualities.



I managed to hook and land a 9lb tailor in Lake Tyers on a live mullet some years ago whilst fishing for dusky flathead, and this was an experience to remember. The largest tailor recorded by the Australian Anglers Association weighed 12.1kgs and was caught near Shark Bay in Western Australia. In Victoria tailor are a minor commercial species, the **largest catch coming from the Gippsland Lakes** with a total weight in 2008/9 of 34 tonnes, which was valued at \$130,000 or \$3.80 per kg. (The commercial catch equates to 34,000-1kg tailor, and one can only wonder at the impact on tourism and recreational angling as well as wealth in the region if this catch was available to the recreational anglers of this state, rather than being taken in commercial nets.)

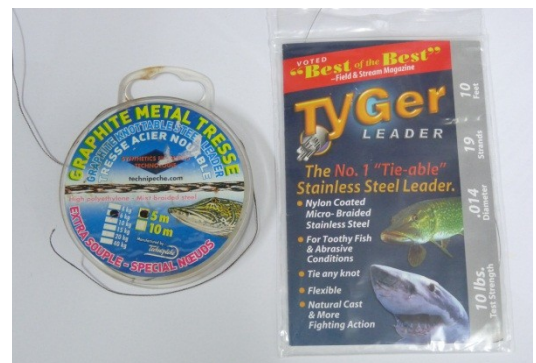
Lance Wedlick in his book "Fishing in Australia" suggests "the Australian tailor is probably the same fish as the American bluefish which has a large following along the east coast of America." And that "along the NSW coast they are considered the most sporting fish in those waters."

Whilst an estuary such as the Gippsland Lakes is open to the sea, and others such as Marlo and Bemm are mostly open, Lake Tyers has not been open since November 2007. Given the number of small tailor in Tyers and the fact that it is over three years since the lake was open to the sea, it seems probable that tailor have spawned in this lake, but then that is an anglers supposition with no scientific support. There seems to have been few studies on tailor in southern Australia, however in the northern states it is one of the most popular recreational species and tagging and research on the species is being undertaken.

Biting through the line is no longer a problem

Any fish bait alive or strip or any lure that imitates a swimming fish will catch tailor, however the live mullet has a special attraction for tailor. Some years ago I solved the problem of tailor biting off the line by using a small piece of knotable wire (6cms) tied on the end of the leader, and the hook is attached to this wire. The wire used for tailor, has a breaking strain of about 10lbs, and completely solves the problem of this species biting through the line and the wire is as fine and supple.

A new product I have been trialling is a stainless steel wire that can be easily knotted with the normal knots used by anglers. This is more expensive at \$20 for 10 feet but seems a terrific product with many uses. The normal knotable wire and the new product do not seem to hinder dusky flathead taking a live mullet or the movements of the mullet. The new stainless steel wire is as supple as a monofilament line of 10lb breaking strain and the wire diameter is far less than a 10lb monofilament line. Whilst double the cost of knotable wire it is a great product for anglers who love to catch tailor. The knotable wire at \$15 for 10 metres may seem expensive however using only 5-6cms per time means you can generally get two seasons out of one spool, and this makes it a fairly economic purchase. Using these products one never loses a tailor due to biting through the line, and I feel sure the 9lb tailor that gave me such a thrill would never have been landed, but for 6cms of knotable wire.



Woody Debris for the Snowy Estuary

The East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority has announced that they propose to attach 132 large root ball logs to existing piles in the Snowy estuary to build up the diversity and size of existing large wood structures in the estuary. The Authority states that these structures play an important role in the provision of food and shelter for valuable fish populations in the estuary. As well as the installation of large wood in the estuary the authority will be stabilizing several sections of riverbank.



Over the last three years the EGCMA has spent approximately \$350,000 on installing large wood into the Snowy estuary. The EGCMA provided the following statement on the perceived benefits of the installation of woody debris. “By providing in-stream habitat, the potential for key recreational species such as black bream and luderick to aggregate spawn and traverse the waterway with adequate cover is greatly increased. This benefits Victoria’s recreational fishers and improves their fishing through increased recruitment of recreational species leading to more healthy and sustainable populations of fish for anglers to utilize. Strategically placed, the timber structures will enhance links with existing habitat, and host plants and small animals that will soon become food and shelter for fish.” The photo shows small luderick attracted to woody debris.

Thanks to [Becky Hemming Senior Catchment Planner EGCMA for this information](#)

Anglers are certainly aware of the value of woody debris for species such as estuary perch and luderick, and in the Snowy estuary over the years the few snags have been fished almost everyday. Anglers fishing for bream, luderick and estuary perch invariably look for snags to fish. The attached photo shows numbers of luderick at the logs in the Snowy estuary. Whilst some have questioned the value returning logs to our estuaries and streams, I personally have no doubt that the fishing and environment is enhanced with this action, and after 100 years of desnagging and destroying habitat we have a long task to return our fish habitat to what it was years ago. Currently a program of replacing snags has been undertaken in the Murray River where in a stretch of river between Hume Dam and Lake Mulwala 4500 large snags have been put back into the river since 2004. With this return of woody debris a study is being undertaken by the Murray Darling Basin Authority to monitor fish numbers. Initial results indicate an increase in fish numbers and fish utilising the restored woody debris.

In the 2009/10 Recreational Fishing Licence Trust Account expenditure statement for Gippsland \$215,780 has been allocated to improve fish habitat in the Gippsland Lakes tributaries by the further provision of woody debris in the Nicholson, Mitchell and Tambo Rivers in the form of root balls, logs and timber structures. This work is to be carried out by the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority and they must be congratulated on the work being undertaken to restore fish habitat.

The latest **Angler Diary Newsletter** (March 9th 2011) states that “using \$85,000 from the Recreational Fishing Grants Program the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority has placed 30 log structures into the lower Mitchell River, below the cut at Eagle Point, as the Mitchell has experienced a gradual reduction of suitable habitat in recent years.”

Odd Bits



Fish Eat Fish

After reading contributions to this newsletter on fish eating fish, I happened to have got a few small squid off a local trawler along with some prawns. I was working at the sink cleaning these squid and thinking of that topic, when to my surprise this small squid pictured had two sand whiting in its stomach. It almost appears that in the estuarine environment and along our coast no species is safe from predators.

Grayling in the Tambo River

Reading recently I found reference to a study of grayling in the Tambo River. (T.M.Berra A.Campbell and P.D.Jackson) This study was carried out in 1979 and was a study into the diet of this species and 558 fish were taken and their stomachs examined. Now I am aware that grayling were once taken on flies, however despite fishing the Tambo River regularly I have never caught a grayling or met a fellow angler who has. According to the excellent book “A Guide to Freshwater Fish of Victoria” (Cadwallader and Backhouse)



Grayling grow to a size of 33cms and weight of 0.5kgs. This species was once common according to this book but has declined dramatically since European settlement. The spawning season in the Tambo River is April-may and the female produces 25-60,000 eggs. The fry are swept downstream to estuarine waters or the sea where they remain for six months before returning to freshwater. Whilst they have been found to be 6 years old in odd cases most die in their second year after spawning. They were once a popular sport fish being taken on small flies and they were renowned as a fine fighting fish for their size. Successful attempts were made to propagate this species in Tasmania last century. The diet study found that the most frequent food of grayling was aquatic insects and plant material. The grayling is pictured on page 38 in the 2010/11 Fishing Guide and is totally protected.

In 1985 the Fisheries and Wildlife Department in a submission to the Tambo River Improvement Trust stated "The division regards the Tambo River as one of the most important rivers in Victoria for the Conservation of Grayling."

It would appear that the grayling is a fascinating but seldom seen fish that inhabits the Tambo River.

Thanks to Rebecca Jol of Fisheries Lakes Entrance for the illustration of the Grayling.

Cruise Cast Catch

The article on VICTAG in the last issue of Around the Jetties describing the fish tagging program in Victoria was placed on the Cruise Cast Catch website by Anthony Gomes the coordinator of the site. This website emanates from Managrida in the Northern Territory and is well worth bringing up on your computer, as it covers a variety of issues and areas and draws information from numerous sources. Have a look at www.cruiseCastCatch.com

Eastern King Prawns in Lake Tyers

Since bringing this issue to the attention of recreational anglers I have not heard one positive response from recreational anglers to researching the introduction of King Prawns to Lake Tyers. Many anglers have expressed concern that research items of importance have been disregarded. The 2009/10 Recreational Fishing Licence Working Group, a faceless body of eight people appointed by the previous Government allocated \$232,497 or almost 50% of the funds allocated to the entire Gippsland area to a NSW researcher Dr Matt Taylor to look into the possibilities of stocking Lake Tyers with Eastern King Prawns. When the Lake Tyers Management Plan was undertaken several recreational anglers submissions suggested examination of stocking this lake with estuary perch. This was not accepted and this researcher in a report for the Department of Primary Industry into Marine Stocking in Victoria (Feb 2010) suggested that the "current small interest in estuary perch by anglers fishing Lake Tyers mean the costs and benefits of estuary perch releases would need to be carefully assessed and may not be justifiable."

I wonder where the evidence of the "current small interest in estuary perch" was obtained. Alternatively I would suspect from speaking to many Lake Tyers recreational anglers that almost no interest exists among anglers I have spoken to for stocking this lake with Eastern King prawns. Despite this the researcher has received almost \$250,000 of anglers recreational licence fees to undertake this research. It just makes one wonder how the Recreational Fishing Licence Working Group arrived at this decision, and whether the decision would have been different if they had to justify it to recreational anglers of the state. It is worth remembering that in the early 1980's over 1.5 tonnes of estuary perch were taken in commercial nets in Lake Tyers; however they are now almost nonexistent. This lake once supported estuary perch and undoubtedly it could do so again with restocking.

Blue Fin Tuna Research

With funding from the Recreational Fishing Grants Licence Program (\$187,000) and with the cooperation of anglers and scientists from Fisheries Victoria information will be collected on the blue fin tuna recreational fishery largely based on Portland. A diary program has been introduced and this is a further extension of the Angler Diary Program. It is hoped that by 2012 fisheries scientists will be able to report on the size of the blue fin catch. The development of this game fishery has provided economic and social impacts in southwestern Victoria however the scope of these impacts is largely unknown. Anglers will be interested in the size and value of this fishery when the results of the current research are released in 2012. [Source Angler Diary Newsletter March 2011](#)



Heavy Fines for Illegal Fishing

“Three Melbourne men have been fined thousands of dollars for illegal fishing in northeast Victoria” This was an introduction and the heading of a recent Fisheries Victoria Media Release dealing with a 69 year old man who appeared in the Mansfield court charged with using excessive recreational fishing equipment and prohibited bait in the Goulbourn River near Thornton. He was fined \$2000 and equipment forfeited. This was the second time in three months that this fellow had been apprehended. Earlier in the day two men were charged with using commercial equipment in Lake Eildon last November. The two men were fined \$1000 and their equipment forfeited.

Editor

I must say that whilst the heading of the Media Release was “Heavy Fines,” I suspect that many anglers would suggest that these anglers got off very lightly and our courts could send a far stronger message to these poachers, whose actions impinge on every legal angler and their sport.

Artificial Reefs under Existing Piers

In Issue 43 the jetty modification that Metung resident David Strange had carried out under his jetty with the installation of reef balls under the jetty, and the resulting growth of fish numbers and varieties as the reef balls developed crustaceans and weed was described. I recently discovered this approach had been adopted in the United States in Piedmont Carolina. This was called pier habitat modification and a study was carried out on 77 piers that had used plastic “fish hab modules” similar to the reef balls used in Metung. All piers were sampled using an electro fisher during April, July and October 2001. Fish abundance was generally higher. One year after installation 92% of pier owners expressed satisfaction with pier modifications and supplementing piers with habitat structures was recommended to enhance habitat. The work of David Strange in modifying his jetty and the increase in fish numbers and varieties should provide impetus for the development of an artificial reef in the Gippsland lakes, and also for jetty owners to consider modifications to jetties using reef balls to develop fish habitat.

Source- [North American Journal of Fisheries Management. 2004](#)

Growth in Fish Farming

Recently I read that a salmon producer Tassal Industries in Tasmania had grown to be the states biggest employer of labour with over 700 employees. It currently produces at 18 sites over 3000 tonnes of salmon annually of which one third valued at \$100m is exported and the company is hoping to double this figure in the next twenty years. The chief executive Mark Ryan says the company will be looking for new areas to set up fish farm leases hopefully but not necessarily in Tasmania.

I find it interesting to compare this one enterprise with the total commercial catch in the Gippsland Lakes which in 2008/9 was a mere 254 tonnes of which 105 tonnes was European Carp or the entire offshore catch in Victoria which was 2032 tonnes. Generally the catch of wildfish worldwide is declining, whilst the aquaculture industry is growing rapidly. It just makes one wonder at the value of maintaining a commercial fishery in the Gippsland Lakes of species obviously under considerable threat, namely black bream and dusky flathead, the premier estuary fish species.

Bream Tagging in East Gippsland in 1944

If most readers were like me, they would have thought that the recent bream tagging with transmitters undertaken by Dr Jeremy Hindell was the first attempt to study the movement of black bream, however an attempt to track the movement of black bream was undertaken many years prior to the recent fascinating study that provided so much information to anglers and scientists, and was previously reported in this publication. In 1944 A. Dunbavin Butcher together with John. K. Ling undertook a study of the movement of black bream by catching 2450 bream and tagging them with metal tags and then releasing them. 990 fish were tagged and released in the Gippsland Lakes and 1460 bream were released other estuaries along the East Gippsland coast. The recovery rate for the Gippsland Lakes was 2.2% and the overall recovery rate was 1.2%. Perhaps the most interesting discussion from the small sample return was the following statement in the report.

“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 a bream in the open sea.” Whilst movement of fish within the lake could not be evaluated nor growth rates it was a first attempt at understanding the movement of black bream in the Gippsland Lakes.

[The report was published in the Victorian Naturalist January 1962.](#)

A Visit to the Box Hill Fish Markets

Last weekend I visited the Box Hill Fish Markets and was amazed at the number of Asian Fish Shops and the variety of fish available. All meat, vegetable, and food shops were Asian, and again the variety and quality made for a most attractive hour of exploration, however the one thing that I found of greatest interest was the current fish prices. Fillets of flathead were \$39.99 a kg whilst whole flathead were \$14.99 a kg. The flathead appeared to be rock flathead. The humble redbfin that many of us caught in years past were about 30cms and were \$14.99 a kilo whole, whilst golden perch (yellow belly) were \$22.99 a kilo whole. I discovered black bream displayed in only one of the six stalls, and there were just 4 fish, and they appeared to be just size and were \$18.99 a kg whole. The cheapest fish I saw displayed were Australian salmon, which were quite large whole fish, and they were priced at \$5.90 a kg. There was imported fish almost exclusively from New Zealand, and in most cases they were whole fish and varieties I had not seen previously. It would seem that black bream and dusky flathead from the Gippsland Lakes play little part in this large fish market, on the evidence I saw on this busy evening. Any readers down that way could do worse than visit this bustling market with its Asian foods.

Macquarie Perch Bred in Captivity.

Some years ago I wrote in Around the Jetties of the demise of Macquarie Perch and how in the sixties over a ton of perch were taken from the Jamieson swimming hole by recreational anglers who had no bag limit. This species never entered the Jamieson River again in numbers and appeared to be a sad story of the effect of the lack of regulation on a wonderful species of fish. The great news is that Macquarie Perch have been bred for the



first time at Snobs Creek hatchery. During the 1980's and 90's wildfish caught provided brood stock for a limited breeding program, but now this breakthrough will assist the recovery of the Macquarie Perch in its natural range. Perhaps sometime in the future this iconic species will return to the Jamieson River from Lake Eildon once again. This year 8,300 Macquarie perch were released into three waters of which 5,600 fingerlings were bred in captivity. Expedition Pass Reservoir received 3,000, Lake William Hovell 2,800, and the Ovens River between Myrtleford and Wangaratta received 2,800. Congratulations to the DPI scientists at Snobs Creek, and perhaps in the future we may see a stocking of vast numbers of this wonderful fish in the waters in this state.

Source Fish fax 21st April 2011

A Thought to Ponder

I am wondering whether the coalition policy of protecting spawning fish by “introducing controls on the practice of commercial netting near the mouths of river,” might be introduced before the 2011 spawning season and the movement of fish into the Tambo and Mitchell rivers to spawn in August.

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**