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## Around the Jetties

July/ August 2011 Issue No 48

### An Anglers Newsletter

**I have learned that I am also a person who has to be able to go fishing whenever I can for as long as I want to go. It is a silly thing, but there it is.**

**Howell Raines - Fly Fishing through the Mid**

#### Life Crisis (1993)

##### Editorial

Readers will note that there will be no August edition of Around the Jetties and this is due to the pressing need to give the Printing and Editorial Department (Dawn), a winter break so we are cruising from Sydney to Fremantle during August and returning on the Indian Pacific. This edition of Around the Jetties (48) is a big issue with many important articles and none more so than the continuing identification problems of dusky and blue spot flathead. The article by John Harrison who has sought answers from the Museum Victoria who have in turn sought information from a worldwide authority indicates the role recreational anglers can play in fishing in seeking answers to problems facing the average recreational anglers. This issue also marks a contribution from the **Minister Peter Walsh** answering a number of queries raised by this publication. I know all readers will welcome the Ministers response although perhaps not agreeing with him on some of the issues. My personal thanks to local member **Tim Bull MLA** for taking the questions raised to the Minister. Finally, there is a report on the views of Martin Salter, a retired English Parliamentarian brought to Australia by the Boating and Fishing Council to advise on organising Recreational Anglers so that anglers might have a greater input into their sport as well as other reports that are hopefully of interest to Recreational Anglers. Good reading.

#### 2010/11 Marine and Estuarine Finfish Fisheries Assessment Gippsland Lakes (Non-Bream)

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of June I attended the above the above stock assessment of species other than black bream in the Gippsland Lakes. This is a brief summary of a six-hour meeting involving Fisheries Officers and fisheries scientists (13) and John Harrison and myself as the only recreational anglers who accepted the invitation to attend.

**Commercial fishers again failed to attend despite most of the discussion being based on their catch records.**

I understand a private meeting took place the previous day with representatives of the commercial fishers. This has been a normal response of the commercial fishermen of the Gippsland Lakes who have not attended a meeting where recreational anglers have been invited since 2005; however, it was also most disappointing that only two recreational anglers attended and VRFish did not have a representative at this meeting. Dr James Andrews, Program Leader Fisheries Victoria chaired the meeting.

The first three hours of the meeting involved a report on almost every species taken by the commercial fishery, in the Gippsland Lakes and in many cases, the statistics represented catches from 1900 and provided a profile of the fishery excluding bream. Lauren Brown presented the commercial statistics, and Dr Murray MacDonald Manager Bays and Inlets, provided additional comments on the statistics.

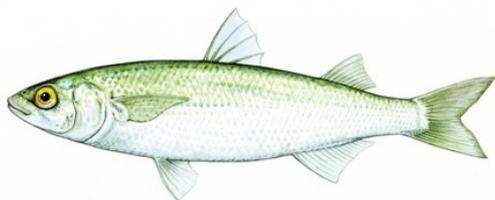
In dealing with the **dusky flathead** catch, it was evident that there had been a decline in the commercial catch since 2005/6, and Fisheries Officers indicated that decline was reflected in the recreational catch. Dr MacDonald made the point that greater effort was being put into the commercial fishery for this species due to higher prices and the decline

in black bream catches, however despite these facts he believed the decline was cyclic in nature. I must say I found it hard to accept the continued netting of a declining key recreational fishery and doubted the view advanced of a cyclic decline.

The issue of flathead recognition provided discussion both in the meeting and over lunch and there seemed to be a high level of agreement with the view advanced in the last edition of *Around the Jetties*, namely treating dusky and blue spot flathead with similar catch regulations. John Harrison who has done a great deal of work on this issue has provided an important article following this report on recognition of dusky flathead

According to the statistics presented tailor account for 7% of the commercial catch with 84% being caught in mesh nets and the catch averaging 30 tonnes per annum. Mostly the fish caught are juveniles and are a by catch of netting for other species.

**One of the most marked declines in commercial catches has been yellow eye mullet.**



This species makes up 5% of the commercial catch and accounts for less than 20 tonnes today as compared with 300 tonnes in the mid fifties. This is a dramatic decline and no reasons were given for this decline although it was noted poor prices might have contributed to reduce fishing effort for this species. It was pointed out that the recreational catch of this species was also now extremely low which would seem to indicate far less availability of this species in the Gippsland Lakes.

**Silver trevally** catches have also declined somewhat with the catch today being below 15 tonnes. The reason for the reduction in the minimum legal length of silver trevally from 23-20cms was questioned. The answer provided suggested those working on the regulations had not taken into account the commercial submission, and that the 23cm MLL would have put a number of commercial fishermen in Corner Inlet out of business. 50% of the commercial catch of silver trevally was said to come from Corner Inlet. It was indicated recreational anglers approved the drop in legal length, which was taken to mean VRFish gave its approval.\*\*

The catch of **King George Whiting** was about 2% of the commercial catch and amounted to about 2 tonnes per annum. This was particularly interesting as King George Whiting is not a species that is specifically listed in the published commercial catches of the Gippsland Lakes. Most catches of this species take place in Reeves Channel. **Luderick** are a by-product of the haul seine netting and average 20 tonnes per annum and there has been very little change over the years. It was noted that it is a species that provides a poor return to commercial fishermen.

The **Australian salmon** provides an extremely variable catch, again being mostly netted in Reeves Channel where there is a marine environment. Fish are mostly taken by the haul seine method and in the last three years the catch has averaged only 3 tonnes per year. The largest catch in the last 30 years has only been 30 tonnes in 2004/5.

I found this personally of interest given the increasing salinity of the lakes I would have expected larger commercial catches of both tailor and salmon

**River Garfish**, with catches up to 50 tonnes in the 1980's have almost no recorded catches today whilst the catch of **estuary perch** has been less than 0.5 of a tonne average. On the figures presented there was a 20 tonne spike in 1989/90, and it was pointed out that this figure did not coincide with Catch and Effort published statistics of 7 tonnes in that year. Fisheries indicated this may have been due to incorrect recording of species and the matter would be looked into.

Comment was also made on the decline of the bait industry of the Gippsland Lakes with some licences not being used and declining bait stocks as well as a decline in bait variety.

Perhaps the two most noticeable changes have been the increase in the European crab catch that now makes up 20% of the commercial catch and the decline in the European carp catch, which is generally considered to be a product of increasing salinity of the Gippsland Lakes.

Following the presentation of the commercial report there was a short summary of the recreational report on species other than bream presented by fisheries scientist Simon Conron. This presentation was based on boat ramp surveys and angler diary reports, as well as offsite phone surveys and applied largely to the rivers entering Lake King. Because recreational anglers target in the main black bream very little information was available on other species being caught. Dianne Crook, who most anglers who fish the rivers will know as the lady recording and measuring catches, reported that nearly all her reports involved only black bream with some dusky flathead.

This Stock Assessment was almost entirely based on commercial statistics and the absence of commercial fishermen really undermined any worthwhile discussion on issues such as declining flathead numbers etc, whilst the exclusion of black bream removed the main target species for recreational anglers from discussion. The lack of attendance of commercial fishers and the poor attendance of recreational anglers needs to be addressed and perhaps the program needs to be examined. Fisheries Victoria will release a summary of this meeting, within two months, with a published report next year.

\*\*I understand VRFish opposes the retention of the 20cm minimum legal length for silver trevally and urges a return to the 23cms as stated in the regulations. I am also aware that amongst anglers a 30cm MLL is generally regarded as the preferred minimum legal size option.

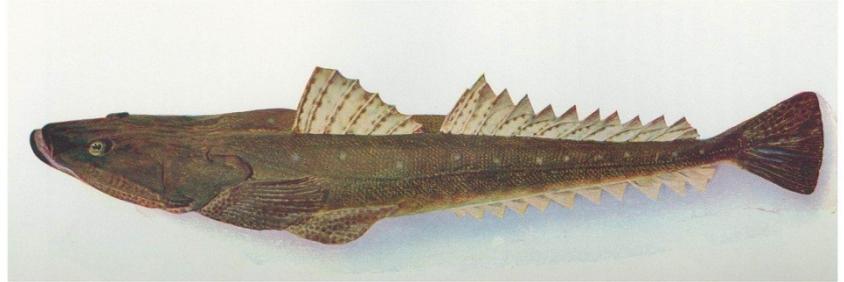
### **A Brief Summary of the Discussion**

A decline was noted in the commercial statistics in the Gippsland Lakes for catches of flathead dusky/blue spot, yellow eye mullet, river garfish, carp and to a lesser extent silver trevally. A decline was also noted in the supply of bait and variety of baits, whilst with increasing salinity of the Gippsland Lakes, there was no increase in either the Australian salmon or tailor catches in the Lakes, as many would have expected. The only major increase was in the catch of European Shore crabs. As a personal comment, given the recreational reliance on dusky/blue spot flathead in the Gippsland Lakes, the future for recreational anglers in the Lakes does not appear bright.

## **IDENTIFICATION OF DUSKY FLATHEAD AND YANK FLATHEAD**

### **Further Developments in the Story**

**John Harrison -  
Research Angler Lake Tyers**



For the benefit of readers who have not been following the issue, I will summarise the information provided in previous editions of “Around the Jetties”, and then outline recent developments.

Dusky flathead and Southern Blue Spot (yank) flathead have different bag and size limitations. In the annual Anglers Guide, Fisheries Victoria outlines two criteria for distinguishing between the two species. One criterion utilises tail markings and the other criterion uses the relative lengths of the two pre-opercula spikes on the head. In 2008, Fisheries Victoria reversed the definition using the relative lengths of the pre-opercula spikes so that the criteria, which originally applied for yank flathead now applied for dusky flathead and vice versa. This resulted in many dusky flathead being incorrectly identified as yanks. Fisheries Victoria failed to pursue this issue when it was brought to their attention in 2008.

More recent developments are that Fisheries Victoria was asked for the sources it utilised when determining the criteria. An examination of the sources provided by Fisheries failed to find any basis for either the original or the changed criterion.

A request for clarification was made to the Australian Museum where experts examined their specimens but were unable to come to any conclusion. On my behalf, the Australian Museum then contacted “Hisashi” - the world flathead expert in Japan. He examined the 19 dusky flathead and 20 yank flathead in his collection and concluded, that the length of the spines was inconsistent and could not be used to separate the two species. He was asked how the two species could be distinguished. Unfortunately, there is considerable overlap between each criteria and a range of factors must be considered in order to make a definite identification. His full answer is quoted at the end of this report.

Lynton Barr and I attended a Gippsland Lakes Stock Assessment workshop held in Bairnsdale on June 19<sup>th</sup>. Present were senior Fisheries Victoria managers and Fisheries Victoria scientists. The above information was presented. Fisheries were also able to provide a number of yank flathead carcasses for examination, which also showed inconsistent spine length. Two additional factors emerged which also make identification of the two species even more difficult. Firstly, at least near the edges of their range and particularly at Lake Tyers, the tail markings of dusky flathead are inconsistent and not a reliable indicator. Secondly there is a third flathead –the Eastern Blue Spot Flathead- which is found as far south as Lakes Entrance and which is easily confused with the Southern Blue Spot or yank flathead. Its tail markings lie somewhere between those of the yank and the dusky.

It was accepted by the Senior Fisheries managers present that the criteria for identifying yanks and dusky listed in the angler handbook was incorrect and also that it would be unrealistic for recreational anglers to apply the complex criteria used by the Japanese expert to correctly identify the two species. Informal discussion centred on removing the distinction between dusky and yank (and Eastern Blue Spot flathead?) There was considerable discussion on

whether there should be one bag limit and size restriction for duskies/yanks throughout Victoria, or, whether there should be a geographical restriction with one set of regulations for east of and including the Gippsland Lakes and another for the remainder of Victoria. (The Gippsland Lakes is as far south as the dusky flathead are found.)

My personal view is that there should be one set of regulations applying throughout Victoria. Extensive research from NSW indicates that all large dusky flathead are females and that the majority of females do not reach sexual maturity until 56 cm length. Fisheries Victoria also acknowledges that the numbers of breeding age females in Lake Tyers and in Mallacoota Inlet have been reduced to such an extent that they are on the point of impacting on successful breeding and hence fish stock survival. In fact, it is my understanding that an internal fisheries working party has recently been established to identify strategies which might protect the few remaining breeding females. In the absence of information to the contrary I would have thought that the breeding patterns of yank flathead could be assumed to be similar to those of the dusky flathead and that therefore the same restrictions to protect the breeding yank females should also apply.

Of course, for many years, recreational anglers have been aware of the pressures on the large breeding female stock and most serious anglers have been releasing large dusky flathead and large yank flathead.

Fisheries Victoria are often criticised by recreational anglers for taking what seems to be a disproportionate amount of time to produce reports, to release reports and to react to concerns. Let us hope that Fisheries Victoria acts quickly on both the issue of flathead identification and on the issue of conserving breeding stock.

John Harrison

21-6-2011

**The Japanese expert's response in full** (I have substituted the common names in place of the scientific names used.)

“It is easy to separate dusky flathead and yank flathead. Dusky flathead usually has 13 second dorsal and anal fin rays (vs. usually 14 in yanks), usually spots on the upper half of the caudal fin and that near margin blackish (vs. most parts of caudal fin with spots, usually 3 or 4 near lower posterior margin blackish) and 9-12 gill rakers (vs. 11-14 [usually 13 or 14]. In addition Dusky flathead usually has a very (sic) dorsal fin spine anteriorly, whereas this spine is absent in Yank flathead (but this spine is really short and is very easy to overlook).”

John Harrison

### Editor

Special thanks to John Harrison for his work on the identification of dusky and blue spot flathead. It would now seem the matter is one of some urgency for Fisheries Victoria to address given that it would seem impossible to specifically identify either species and this has ramifications for compliance with current regulations.

### Climate change and new offshore recreational fishing opportunities for Victoria

The following item was contributed by Dallas D'Silva, the Climate Change Policy Manager of Fisheries Victoria in the interest of keeping anglers informed of the immediate effects of the climate changes taking place on recreational fishing.

“The Victorian climate is changing. Changes to ocean temperatures, currents, winds, rainfall and more frequent extreme weather events are being observed across South East Australia.

Importantly, climate change should also see some improved fishing opportunities for recreational fishers in Victoria with a wider range of species on offer. The South Eastern Australian marine waters have been identified as a climate change 'hotspot'. Research indicates the East Australian Current has strengthened by 20 per cent over the last 50 years and is likely to continue to strengthen by another 20 per cent by 2100.



This is likely to result in more warm water sub-tropical species being observed in eastern Victoria in future.

Victoria's fisheries are already diverse and geographically extensive, and that diversity is likely to increase for some popular angling species. Over the last summer, new species being encountered by anglers in Victoria included Dolphin fish (mahi mahi), yellow fin tuna, striped tuna and cobia. During the last summer a Dolphin fish (or mahi mahi) was caught near Barwon Heads much to the surprise of a keen angler (left.) They are highly mobile fish

and have provided a great offshore fishing opportunity off Portland during March and May. The Portland fishery is likely to be supplied by fish carried on the Leeuwin Current, which flows south near the western coast of Australia.



Cobia or black kingfish are normally encountered in the warmer waters of Queensland and have been caught by Victorian anglers in late summer and autumn as far south as Port Albert and Corner Inlet in south Gippsland. Schools of striped tuna also thrilled anglers near the entrance to Port Phillip Bay during February and March. The recreational take of the abovementioned species is subject to a catch limit of 5 fish per person, with the exception of yellow fin tuna, which has a bag limit of 2 fish per person.

Recreational fishers and divers are encouraged to assist by becoming 'citizen scientists' in the front line of change. Fishers are encouraged to report any unusual catches or observations to the DPI Customer Call Centre on 136 186. Fisheries Victoria is overseeing a \$3.2 million research program into climate change that seeks to understand climate change impacts on fisheries resources and develop approaches to adapt to those trends.

Victoria is also the coordinator for the South East Australian Climate Change Program and works in collaboration with neighbouring States and the Commonwealth on this important issue. For further information, please contact Mr Dallas D'Silva, Fisheries Victoria Climate Change Policy Manager on (03) 9658 4363."

### Estuary Perch in Lake Tyers Now Fact

I received the attached photo from Matt Leach, and it is a picture of a beautiful estuary perch that was caught by Robert Harvey in 2009. Matt wrote the following- "The picture is of my mate Robert Harvey. We have caught a few estuary perch over the years while targeting bream high up in the system over summer. The photo was taken in February 2009. I did have some other photos of Lake Tyers perch, but lost the SD card they were on. Lake Tyers is not the place we target perch as it is probably the least likely place to get them, but we do spend a lot of time targeting these fish elsewhere. As with most EP anglers we are pretty tight lipped about where we get them, as they can be extremely vulnerable at times, and large tallies are not uncommon. We release every fish we catch, but are not against people taking a couple for a feed.



I think Lake Tyers is however the perfect place for restocking to take place and would love to see Fisheries Victoria take it on, along with either a possession limit or a 2 fish bag limit. It is my understanding that seagrass is very important for the spawning of estuary perch and I cannot remember seeing much of it in Lake Tyers. I guess due to Lake Tyers being a small catchment with relatively small inflow, meaning that it does not open up very often. I'm no scientist but this is what I have found after concentrating on EP as my number one species to chase."

Matt also attached a picture of a 50cm estuary perch so that I could put a face to the name but he also explained this was not a Lake Tyers perch.

#### Editor

The information we have received now positively indicates a small number of estuary perch are to be found in Lake Tyers. I think it also needs to be recognised that the keen EP anglers are very quiet on where they catch the species, given the kills of this species in the past prior to bag limits being introduced relatively recently.(2000)

Some of the keenest anglers that I have come in contact with have been the anglers who target the estuary perch, so its very hard to understand the statement by Dr Matt Taylor in his report to Fisheries Victoria (Feb 2010) suggesting one reason for not stocking Lake Tyers with estuary perch is **"the current small interest of anglers fishing Lake Tyers in estuary perch."** Recreational anglers can only wonder where Dr Taylor obtained this view, and to hope other items in his report to Fisheries were more accurate. Thanks to Matt Leach for this information and photos.

## South Gippsland Angling Clubs Recognise Around the Jetties.

The following letter was received on the 24<sup>th</sup> April.

Dear Lynton,

I wish to congratulate you on your excellent newsletter, which widely circulates in South Gippsland. It is most important that the communication channels amongst recreational fishers remain open and many fishers are informed on what is happening. We all need to work together to ensure the ongoing threats to recreational fishing are adequately dealt with and the interests of recreational fishers are enhanced. We look forward to your newsletters.

In your issue No44, the article on the lack of proof that Parks Vic has effectively spent the \$38m allocation on management and development of Marine Parks is a concern to the association. We have written to the relevant Minister and will pursue this issue. Even though recreational fishers cannot fish in these parks, scientific research on the marine environment and the fishes that live in and pass through these parks will improve our scientific understanding and, we believe, has the capability to provide a better scientific understanding of issues which are relevant to the enhancement of recreational fishing outside the parks.

Thank you for your excellent newsletter  
Max Fletcher (Secretary SGACA)

### Editor

I thank the SGACA for this letter and the kind remarks, and would draw to the attention of Angling Clubs that many clubs are now receiving 'Around the Jetties' by email, and then forwarding the publication to all members who have email facilities. This is a simple procedure but means a wider distribution to recreational anglers of material you would not find published in any regular fishing magazine. (One metropolitan club sends 150 members email copies of 'Around the Jetties'.) Other clubs are sending items to members in the club notes and a number of websites are now including articles from 'Around the Jetties'. We are happy for articles to be circulated with the one proviso that the source is acknowledged.

### Seagrass in the Gippsland Lakes

In the 1997 report on seagrass in the Gippsland Lakes the role of seagrass as a marine nursery for small animals and fish is emphasised, and in addition it is noted that seagrass protects the shoreline against erosion. In a report in 1982 over 20,000 minute animals per square metre were found to inhabit healthy seagrass meadows. In a recent 'Around the Jetties' a short report was provided on three snapshot examinations of seagrass in the Gippsland Lakes between 2008-2010, a project of the Gippsland Lakes Catchment Taskforce. The sampling suggested that "seagrass again declined across a number of sites" and certainly there did not seem to be evidence of a general seagrass recovery.

Now what I found of particular interest in the 1997 report was the statement that "in the lakes seagrass biomass is greatest where salinity rarely falls below 25%, which is generally east of Loch Sport." Does this mean the increasing salinity of the Gippsland Lakes should be encouraging the growth of seagrass throughout the lakes, and with this improved habitat for estuarine fish species?

The 1997 report also states, "The dependence of black bream on seagrass in the Gippsland lakes was dramatically illustrated in the 1920's and 1950's when seagrass almost entirely disappeared from the entire Lakes system. The loss of seagrass was matched with a decline in the commercial catch of black bream from a high of 352 tonnes in 1919 to an all time low of 12 tonnes in 1958."

Given the low commercial catch of black bream today, perhaps it is time for another major examination of the status of seagrass in the Gippsland Lakes today. The 1997 extent of seagrass was mapped with an expected 90% accuracy level, and this would provide a base with which to compare the current status of seagrass.

Today as I walk along the banks of Lake King I am struck by the total lack of seagrass washed onto the sand. Four to five years ago local gardeners were gathering this material for mulch. Today it is totally absent. To a layman this provides strong evidence of the decline in seagrass from the lush meadows evident in the 1997 report.

[Source- Marine habitat database Seagrass Gippsland Lakes \(November 1997\)](#)

### Gippsland Ports Survey

Gippsland Ports commissioned two surveys of seagrass habitat in the inner channels at Lakes Entrance in April 2007 and February 2008, and found the area covered by seagrass in these channels had decreased by **67%**, and there had been a **94%** decrease in the area of seagrass in the Inner Channels between April 2007 and February 2009.

## Source Lakes Entrance Seagrass Monitoring and Marine Habitats 2009-Report to Gippsland Ports.

It would appear that seagrass meadows in the Gippsland Lakes are in poor condition, and if the reports above were combined one would have to have concern at the current seagrass situation when compared with the definitive 1997 survey. The current information would suggest a 60% decline overall and in some areas the picture is far worse. This in turn would suggest a substantial impact on fish in the Gippsland Lakes and particularly black bream.

## Odd Bits

### Slow Fishing at Merimbula but the “Eyes” have it!!

Ron Brymer following a recent fishing trip to Merimbula Lake with his wife Kath supplied the following story. Kath had caught a tailor and a silver trevally when this odd experience occurred.

Ron writes” an hour into the fishing in a cold breeze I decided to cast to a small pontoon at the end of a public jetty. We were in six feet of water with heavy weed and only under the pontoon is clear. I flick the plastic in close and let it drop down and get a hit- but miss the fish. Another cast and a nice trevally comes calling to the net-good stuff. Kath likes the idea and fires a cast in close-big jig head and big squidgie. The cast bounces off the metal pontoon and sinks down- and she gets a hit and strikes hard. Says there is a fish on but soon she is stuck down in heavy weed attached to something on the bottom. Much pulling from all angles and we decide we are reefed so it is out with the lure retriever and we move in. I get on top of the “snag” and attach the pole and with a firm push it is free and up comes the culprit- a huge mess of weed – or so we think!!



Kath cleans away the weed and lo and behold there is a huge dusky flathead eye ball on the hook- yep you heard it right- a dusky’s eyeball that measured ½ an inch across. (See the attached picture.) Now we have caught duskies of 10 and 12 lbs, both 90cm fish and the eyes were of similar size-big anyway. We did hang around the jetty with quite a few more casts hoping to catch the big fish and put the eyeball back! No luck though. So if you catch a huge dusky in Merimbula Lake with one eye, we would like to know the length and weight and what might have been. Until next time.”

### An Odd Visitor

Seen in the last month in the vicinity of the Tavern at Lake Tyers has been a rare sighting in this area of a Cape barren Goose. Ken Sherring of the East Gippsland Bird Observation and Conservation group has provided this excellent photograph of this bird. The goose seems very quiet and regularly feeds on the grass in front of the Tavern. According to the Complete Book of Australian Birds Cape barren Geese are generally found in pairs and mate for life. This species is unique to Australia and are among the least numerous waterfowl in the world. The major distribution of the Cape Barren Goose is the islands off the southern coast of Australia but it is known to have made regular visits to southern Australia in the past, and has been seen in the Western District of Victoria. This species was almost hunted to extinction by settlers and sealers from 1797 when George Bass first saw them on the islands off the Victorian Coast. One can only wonder today what this lone stately bird is doing in this area, and where is its mate. Ken Sherring noted the rarity of this sighting and wondered at the bird remaining in this location for such a long period.



### Illegal Anglers Pay the Price.

Three men in Melbourne have been ordered to pay a total of \$33,000 after pleading guilty to netting an illegal haul of more than 800 fish in a seine net near the mouth of the Carrum River on January 11<sup>th</sup> this year according to a media release from Fisheries Victoria. Magistrate Ross Betts was told a high proportion of the fish were undersize and the men were not holders of a commercial licence. Items seized included nets fish and associated equipment. Fisheries prosecutor Rod Barber stated, “River mouths are highly productive fishing grounds and nursery areas of such significance that licensed commercial fishers are prohibited in setting nets within 400 metres of them.”

This was one of the largest hauls of fish killed through illegal netting according to Mr Barber, and Recreational Anglers statewide would applaud the success of Fisheries Victoria and such a result provides a warning for other illegal anglers.

## A New Product

Are you like me and like your cup of coffee in the boat or on the bank, then this 2 cup, 16 oz. mug thermos that you can fill at home and will keep hot for 5 hours might be of interest.



In summer it will keep drinks cool for 9 hours and being a cup thermos you can drink directly from your thermos. I always make my coffee or tea and have a cup before I head out in the morning. Now I will also fill my 2-cup thermos before I leave home. The button on top opens the cup and you drink from the lip. Depress the button to seal it again. A sturdy bottom makes it safe standing on any flat surface. The unit is stainless steel with double wall for heat retention. Saw this at the Alpine Angler in Sale .Cost \$20. Looks Smart too!

## Keep Australia Fishing



**“With over three million anglers in a population of a little over 20 million that have just voted in a “hung” parliament, it is surprising that recreational anglers weren’t given greater attention by the two main political parties.” Martin Salter**  
**The Martin Salter Report**

Martin Salter is a most experienced British Member of Parliament (1997-2010) who is a writer and fishing consultant. He was brought to Australia by the Boating and Fishing Council of Australia and prepared a 54-page report entitled **Keep Australia Fishing**. He also gave evidence to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Recreational Fishing. Interestingly, in the UK he was largely responsible for getting cormorant control measures into law amongst many other notable achievements but he is best known for arguing that anglers are part of the largest participant sport, yet they have little say in their sport and this is particularly so in Australia which is vastly different from countries like New Zealand and Holland where anglers are organised with peak bodies administering anglers funds in the interest of anglers. In a recent interview, he made the point that anglers in Australia need to develop nationally and they are currently disempowered, but then he makes the point that recreational angling is an individual pursuit and many anglers do not want to become politically active, however this may become a necessity if the fishing we enjoy today is to remain. Published in the British Sunday Times on the retirement of Martin Salter from Parliament is the following in relation to British recreational fishing “The sports big weakness is not its leadership but the apathy of its millions, only a handful of whom will contribute to anything not immediately under their rod tips.” The “Times” noted Martin Salters role as engaging many anglers in the issues confronting recreational angling in Britain and that with his retirement “fishing has lost the most effective and committed political campaigner.”

Martin Salter provided a five page executive summary of his report and the following is a short outline of that summary prepared by the Boating and Fishing Council of Australia

**Report calls for national campaign to protect recreational fishing**  
**April 2011**

A detailed report released today has recommended a national campaign to challenge the many threats facing Australia's most popular recreational pursuit.

Titled '**Keep Australia Fishing**', the independent report was commissioned by the Boating and Fishing Council of Australia (BFCA) and prepared by former UK politician Martin Salter.

Mr Salter, who served as Parliamentary Spokesman for Angling under the governments of both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, said the 54-page report drew on "best practice" from other countries around the world where recreational fishing was properly respected and valued as a significant economic contributor. "Australia's recreational fishing industry has been under threat for many years, from fish kills on major rivers, habitat degradation, urban pollution and unjustified marine park lock-outs," Mr Salter said. "While Australia still boasts some of the best recreational fishing in the world, pressure is mounting from poor land use practices and extreme Green movements that regard anglers as part of the problem rather than the solution.

**"Responsible recreational anglers are the true guardians of the aquatic environment and sensible conservationists should be working with them to protect and enhance our fisheries."**

Some of the report's key recommendations include:

- . The Keep Australia Fishing Campaign – an independent body led by the tackle and boating industries to lobby on behalf of recreational fishing, to promote the sport among young people and to effectively challenge actions and practices that are harmful to fishing and fisheries;
- . A new mass membership national peak body – recreational fishing licence (RFL) holders to be members of a new peak advocacy body with full voting rights as in Holland and New Zealand;
- . Independent Recreational Fishery Trust Funds – funded through state RFL revenues and controlled by anglers, free from political patronage;
- . Tougher rules on pollution and habitat degradation – a complete overhaul of allowable chemical discharges
- . Ending unwarranted lock-outs of recreational anglers from marine parks – building community support for proper science-based conservation measures;
- . Regular surveys on economic benefit – there is an estimated three million recreational anglers in Australia and potential economic benefit of up to \$10 billion annually, although accurate figures are needed;
- . Policy development through an Australian Charter for Angling – the emergence of minority parties representing anglers only highlights the failure of too many politicians to take anglers concerns seriously.

**Other key points from the report:**

- . Closing inshore reefs and waters in metropolitan areas to commercial fishing so these popular and pressured areas get to become recreational-only fisheries;
- . Recreational only status for marlin and other designated sport fish species;
- . Restrictions on beach netting and targeting of spawning aggregations;
- . Statutory duty on public bodies to promote recreational fishing;
- . Opening up of water supply dams to anglers;
- . Updated fisheries and environmental legislation.

A copy of the Keep Australia Fishing report is available for download from [www.lovefishing.com.au](http://www.lovefishing.com.au) and [www.recfish.com.au](http://www.recfish.com.au)

In an Australian TV interview, Martin Salter quoted New Zealand where every angler who purchased a fishing licence contributed to the peak body, which then allocated all licence funds and was completely independent from Government and the Minister. This has led to angler involvement and support of the fishing industry and one of the best fisheries in the world. Perhaps this is world's best practice.



## **Minister Responds to Questions**

The following response was to Mr Tim Bull MLA for East Gippsland who raised the matters referred to as a result of an inquiry from this publication

### **RE: AROUND THE JETTIES**

The Minister writes-

I write to provide advice on the matters raised by Mr Lynton Barr, editor of the 'Around the Jetties' recreational fishing industry newsletter, pertaining to the Baillieu-Ryan Government's State Budget initiatives for the sector.

**Query 1: if the \$16m budget boost is all spent on providing native and salmonoid fish where are the funds for the promised infrastructure including artificial reefs, installation of fish ladders, track and boat launching upgrades, etc?**

The \$16.2 million funding over four years for recreational fishing initiatives announced in the budget is for a wide range of activities supporting the sector, not just for the production of more native and salmonoid fish.

The initiative is over a four year period providing scope for worthy new initiatives proposed by the sector to be funded. However, it is intended the funds will include recreational fishing projects, such as:

- Breeding Murray cod, golden perch and rainbow and brown trout at Snobs Creek hatchery;
- Improvements to recreational fishing infrastructure, including artificial reefs, fish cleaning tables and access to jetties;
- Developing new recreational fisheries;
- Work with relevant authorities to improve access tracks and upgrade existing boat launching facilities for recreational fishing;
- Conduct more public forums for recreational fishers and Fisheries Victoria staff to exchange ideas on ways to improve the management of Victoria's fisheries;
- Implement measures to protect spawning fish stocks near river mouths; and
- The development and implementation of research projects to support recreational fishing.

In addition to the \$16.2 million initiative, the Government also committed a further \$900,000 to maintain and enhance the successful 13FISH fisheries intelligence reporting service. This is a vital tool for working with the community to ensure compliance across the sector.

**Query 2: Clarification on the commitment to return revenue from recreational licence fees to the recreational fishing industry and comment on the fact some of this is being spent on fisheries officers and whether this is seen as a return of licence fees to the recreational fishing industry.**

The Coalition Government believe it is important recreational fishers receive value from the licence fees they pay. The Coalition stands firm in our commitment to return all revenue raised from the sale of recreational fishing licences to support the sector.

The Recreational Fishing Grants Working Group has approved a proposal from Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Fisheries Victoria to fund 13 Fisheries Officers from licence revenue.

The employment of Fisheries Officers is an important service to support the recreational fishing sector and maintain the sustainability of fish populations.

In 2009 the DPI undertook a survey of recreational fishers to learn their views on priorities for the sector, 4,400 people who had purchased licences responded to the survey. Respondents were asked to rate how important they thought an activity was for improving fishing. The top three topics rated were:

1. Repairing where fish live;
2. Enforcing fishing rules;
3. Increasing the number of fish for recreational fishers to catch.

The [survey results](#) show strong support for the Government to enforce fishing rules. There is no doubt many people expect Fisheries Officers will be visible and active in enforcing the laws, catching poachers and generally protecting fish populations for the long term benefit of the sector.

The Coalition Government agrees that employment of Fisheries Officers should be a core component of the State's budget contribution to the sector, and this will remain the case. The overwhelming majority of Fisheries Officers are funded from State consolidated revenue. The additional \$16.2 million provided in the recent State Budget to support the recreational fishing sector includes funds to increase fisheries patrols at peak recreational fishing times on weekends and public holidays.

I am confident the Baillieu-Ryan Government has fulfilled its commitment to return all licence revenue and more to support the recreational fishing sector.

### **Question 3: Will Government release the names of the members of the Recreational Fishing Grants Working Group?**

The practice under the former administration was not to release the names of the members of the Recreational Fishing Grants Working Group. This practice was consistent with the way the membership of the predecessor body, the Fishing Revenue Allocation Committee, was not disclosed.

Members of the Working Group are appointed by the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security. Members are appointed for their experience within the recreational fishing sector.

The Working Group comprises an independent chair, Mr John Diplock, a representative of VRFish and members with experience broadly in Port Phillip/Westernport, Gippsland, North-East Victoria, North-West Victoria South-West Victoria, Marine and Coastal waters and also recreational fishing support business.

If the names of individual Working Group members were made public, it could open members to at times, intense and inappropriate lobbying from persons with an interest in particular projects to be considered for funding from recreational fishing licence revenue.

As all grants and projects funded from recreational fishing licence revenue are ultimately approved by the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security, albeit on the recommendation of the Working Group, the transparency for and accountability to individual recreational fishers in respect to the allocation of the funds rests with myself as Minister.

A convincing argument has not been presented as to why the names of Working Group members should be made public. The project evaluation process seems to have worked well up until now, and I expect will continue to do so.

Recreational fishers can propose initiatives to be considered for funding from licence revenue either by raising the matter with the representative organisation VRFish, by application to the Working Group chairman, Mr Diplock via Fisheries Victoria, or to myself as Minister. Of course, any matter brought to my attention I would refer to the Working Group for consideration as appropriate.

I trust this response is of assistance in replying to the matters raised by Mr Barr.

Yours sincerely,

**Peter Walsh MLA**

Minister for Agriculture and Food Security

## **Editors Comment**

**With regard to question 1.** This answer resolves and clarifies the question raised given the Ministers media release which indicated that the Government “would spend about \$4m a year over the next four years to breed more native and salmonoid fish.” This media statement was obviously incorrect, as it would have left no funds for other projects given an expenditure of \$16.2m over four years to improve recreational fishing. It would appear that salmonoid and native fish breeding will be part of the annual \$4m expenditure each year of this Governments expenditure on recreational fishing leaving funds for the listed other projects, but without specifying the amount to be spent on stocking of native and salmonoid fish.

**With regard to Question 2.** Whilst a survey in 2009 indicated angler support for “enforcing fishing rules” was evident this can hardly be extended to believing this was support for using Recreational Fishing Licence fees to fund additional officers. Perhaps if an additional question asking, “Should the funding of additional officers come from within the Fisheries Budget or by the use of RFL funds” a true indication of the wishes of recreational anglers might be capable of assessment. Many would regard this as a somewhat underhand use of survey results, which do not reflect the wishes of many committed anglers. Many recreational anglers would not regard the use of 30% of the RFL fees to pay for the salaries and support of 13 Fishing Officers as coming within the coalitions policy of **returning all revenue raised from the sale of licences to the fishing industry**. Finally the expenditure on employment of Fisheries Officers is a permanent expenditure, and provides a permanent reduction in projects that may be undertaken using RFL fees, including the buyback of commercial licences and research. This in the view of this publication is a regrettable step that would not be supported by anglers and certainly most would view the employment of Fisheries Officers as being a normal charge on the Fisheries Budget. I found it interesting in the Ministers answer that from the \$16.2m over four years some of those funds also “will also be used to increase fisheries patrols at peak recreational fishing times on weekends and public holidays.” This obviously means a further boost to Fishing Officer salaries at those times, and of course this will reduce the amount available for restocking, infrastructure development, and fisheries research amongst others from the \$16.2m fisheries budget over 4 years. The amount allocated for Fisheries Officers salaries is not indicated.

**With regard to Question 3.** It is the view of many anglers that given this **Government's commitment to transparency** it is almost impossible to understand that 8 people appointed by the Minister to recommend the allocation annually of over \$5m of anglers licence fees need the protection of anonymity. Surely the anglers who provide the funds should be aware of the persons allocating the funds and their qualifications to represent the anglers of this state. Perhaps in the interests of democracy the Working Party membership should be elected positions giving anglers the opportunity to vote for members of the Recreational Fishing Grants Working Group. In reality the faceless nature of these appointments and the lack of accountability could lead to far greater difficulties than any suggestions of lobbying pose. I wonder if there are any similar faceless working committees of Government or does it only apply to the Recreational Anglers of this state. I also find it somewhat amazing that VRFish, the angler's peak body has only one person on this committee, and VRFish feel constrained under the previous Ministers approach to anonymity to agree with that position by not informing recreational anglers of the identity of their sole representative on this body. Given the secrecy of this Working Party I would believe the VRFish representative would not be able to report to the body he represents. Correcting this situation created by a previous Government should be part of the Coalitions Recreational Fishing Policy

**Whilst this publication is deeply appreciative of the Ministers detailed response to the questions raised, it is also the hope of this publication that the Minister may recognize some of the arguments put forward for an alternative position that would gain the support of a majority of recreational anglers.**

**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**

**Next Edition- Mid September and the November issue will be the 50<sup>th</sup> issue of Around the Jetties.**