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Around the Jetties

October 2012

Issue No 62

An Anglers Newsletter

An Angler is a man who spends rainy days sitting around on the banks of rivers doing nothing because his wife won't let him do it at home.

Anonymous from the book "Fishing Wit" 2011

Editorial

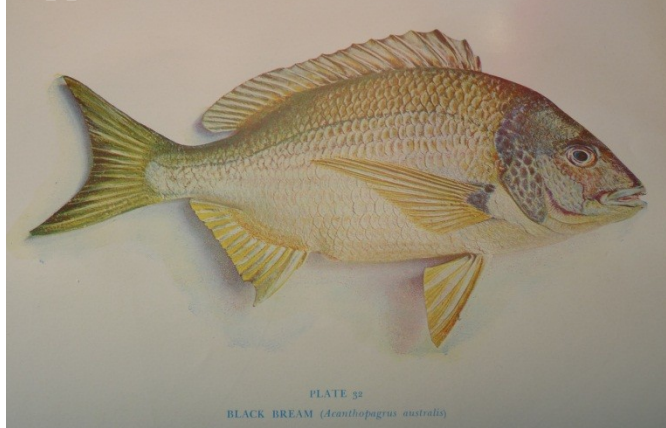
We have just had the latest Black Bream Stock Assessment, and this is little different from previous assessments over the last 17 years, in that it was agreed that black bream are at a "historically low level with no evidence of improvement." In 1996 the size limit was increased from 24cms to 26cms. Also in 2003 the recreational bag limit was reduced from 10 to 5 fish and the prohibition of gill nets at the mouth of rivers was extended from 400 metres to 500 metres. Strangely both the 5 fish bag limit and extension at the mouth of rivers were removed after six weeks. No other action has been taken apart from the increase in the minimum size of black bream in 2005 from 26 to 28cms and this was strongly opposed by commercial fishermen. This change was not without debate as there was no requirement for commercial fishermen to increase their mesh size, and so mortality of fish in nets was thought to have been around 40%. This mortality in turn placed doubts on the effect of the increase in size and the hope that fish would have the opportunity to spawn before being available to be caught. Unfortunately discussion of any actions to improve black bream stocks was not seen as appropriate at stock assessment meetings.

Perhaps it is now time that rather than just assessing the situation we should look at options to improve bream stocks in the Gippsland Lakes. Perhaps now stocking of black bream should be considered, as stocking programs have been undertaken in WA for at least 15 years with success. The issue of a closed season for both recreational and commercial fishing during the spawning period should be examined. This move provides protection for salmonoid and native Murray fish and may be applicable to black bream. Undoubtedly the removal of netting from the mouth of rivers is essential, but perhaps the closure of areas to commercial netting should also be considered. Jones Bay, Cunningham Arm and Bancroft Bay could be considered, after all, in 2001 there were 32 commercial fishermen and yet today 10 commercial fishermen have access to the same extensive area of the Gippsland Lakes. The recreational bag limit should also again be considered, and whilst few anglers ever "bag out" the introduction of a reduced bag limit would indicate to anglers that the black bream in the Gippsland Lakes is a fishery in decline. Finally, I wonder why quotas have never been considered for commercial fishermen. They apply to recreational anglers

with bag limits, but commercial fishermen have no limit on the black bream or dusky flathead they can catch.

In other words, after 17 years of stock assessments perhaps we should open discussion on what could be done for the future. If the draft on the new dusky flathead regulations are approved it might provide some inspiration to examine options for black bream. For too long its been said the decline is a result of environmental factors, but the issue has never been examined with recreational anglers, many of whom bring more than 50 years of experience to any discussion. Perhaps it is time for a change in direction.

Gippsland Lakes 2012 Black Bream Stock Assessment



Since 1995 when it became evident that black bream numbers were in decline stock assessments have taken place every couple of years. At these assessment Fisheries Victoria through their research branch put forward the results of the research undertaken into black bream numbers and seek the views of the recreational anglers. In 2005 this was a two-day event, whilst in 2009 it was a one-day discussion. This year it was a two and a half hour evening assessment with approximately forty minutes allocated to the contribution of recreational anglers to the discussion.

The aim of the assessment workshop, according to Dr Murray MacDonald, Manager of Bays and Inlets, who I think has attended every assessment since 1995, was to examine the biological sustainability of black bream as well as the economic objectives (presumably commercial aspects) and the intangible benefits from recreational fishing for black bream which could included affects on tourism and communities.

There was no contribution to the discussion by commercial fishermen, as they did not attend and this has been the situation since the 2005 black bream stock assessment.

The boycott of this current meeting became more questionable when it was revealed that the commercial catch of black bream as a result of the floods rose from 50 tonnes to 96 tonnes. This followed the 2007/8-flood event that caused spawning fish to exit the rivers and as a result the commercial catch rose from 49 tonnes in 2006/7 to a massive 144 tonnes in 2007/8. Almost no discussion took place of the possible effect on bream stocks of these two events.

Senior Fisheries Research Scientist, Simon Conran, made the point that research indicated that the black bream numbers were not in decline during the last ten years, and that the major decline in numbers occurred in the nineties. According to research findings the black bream stock was now at a relatively stable level, although much lower than the stocks of previous decades, and they may never recover to the former level, and the situation of a historically low stock is possibly what anglers can expect in the future.

Simon did make the point that Diary Anglers in the Gippsland Lakes had suggested that the status of black bream was declining, and I think most anglers would agree with this view. It was also suggested that over the last ten years the commercial catch rate was increasing, however it was below the 30-year average.

Anglers wondered at the effect of the two flood events on the commercial catch, and that perhaps these events had provided a skewed view of the true commercial picture. Fisheries Office, Errol Parmigiani, did indicate that the activities of the commercial sector were legal during flood events, however they did not go right to within the 400 metres allowed from the river mouth. It was pointed out that mesh nets take 87% of the commercial catch whilst seine nets account for the remaining 13% and of course mesh nets were used to net at river mouths.

Simon Conran pointed out that the research material on black bream was now fairly comprehensive, with creel surveys, the Angler Diary Program, phone interviews and in recent years a comprehensive survey conducted by science officer Lauren Brown of juvenile black bream using an otter trawl.

In a final summing up, Dr Murray MacDonald reiterated that that whilst the black bream stocks could be regarded as stable, it is at a low level of productivity compared to the eighties and may not return to

previous levels. There was some evidence of a moderate year class in 2008/9 and in 2010/11 from, but the point was made that it would not compare with the major spawning events of previous years. (Eg 1989)

During the relatively short recreational contribution, the point was made again that Jones Bay is a key area for black bream and that it should be closed to commercial netting. It was also noted that the Cunningham Arm was an important area for tourist angling, and it was an area that provided easy access for both the aged and the young and for this reason it should be closed to commercial netting. A number of anglers disputed the view that the black bream situation was stable and they suggested the decline was continuing.

A limited discussion took place on the work and papers of Joe Williams that suggested, because of the increasing salinity of the Gippsland Lakes, 99% of black bream now spawned in the upper reaches of the rivers. Dr MacDonald suggested the lack of seagrass long considered vital to spawning black bream was lacking where they were currently spawning and this might be affecting the survival of black bream, however he suggested if the authorities released water during the spawning period the spawning of black bream might take place at the mouths of rivers.

Some anglers wondered where authorities would obtain this water as neither the Mitchell, Nicholson nor Tambo Rivers had dams that could release water. An angler also suggested that the availability of seagrass was a problem, as he believed there was a continuing decline and this is supported by the most recent snapshot study of seagrass by Warry and Hindell for the Ministerial Advisory Committee.

The meeting concluded at 9.30, however anglers continued talking for a considerable time discussing the future of black bream in the Gippsland lakes

Editor

I think most anglers who attended were disappointed at the bleak outlook for black bream, and the fact that not one suggestion for the improvement of bream stocks was forthcoming. It could be argued that suggestions for the improvement of the fishery have never be made at this event over the years, however there must be a time when the problem is confronted, and suggestions are examined. Surely the same approach as was applied to dusky flathead could be applied to black bream. I realise it is more difficult because of the commercial fishing of the species, but steps could still be taken to start a discussion on the management of this wonderful fish species for the benefit of future anglers. All we have seen over the last twenty years is a continuing decline and a lack of any action.

The 2010 Fisheries Status Report on black bream in the Gippsland Lakes said, "The most recent formal assessment of the Gippsland Lakes bream stock was conducted in 2008, confirming that stocks remain at historic lows, and finding no evidence for any significant improvement in recruitment." Stable but historically low and no improvement and this has been the situation since 1996. At the very least the problem needs urgent examination and a good starting point might be the protection of spawning fish from commercial nets.

A note of Explanation

This report is provided from notes I took on the night of the meeting. No copies of graphs or material presented by Fisheries Research was made available to the recreational angler participants. I accept responsibility for any mistakes, however I would note that I have requested in writing on a number of occasions that material be provided to participants in hard copy.

A Request

Over recent years on at least two days a week bank anglers fishing the Tambo, Nicholson and Mitchell rivers have been interviewed by Dianne, who has become well known to regular anglers. Fisheries Victoria have amassed a considerable stock of information based on Dianne's work yet no specific information was provided at the Black Bream Stock Assessment by the research Branch. Anglers would be interested in information as to how many anglers had not caught a keepable fish when interviewed, and for how long they had been fishing. What were current recreational angler catch rates and how had they compared with previous years. For anglers this information might provide a clearer picture of the state of the fishery than many of the graphs flashed on a screen with little time to assimilate the information.

Details of angler results undoubtedly readily available from river bank interviews might make stock assessments more attractive to recreational anglers.

More Information on the Value of Recreational Fishing and Boating



I received some data from Ben Scullin of the Boating Industry Association, which adds to the argument that the value of recreational fishing and boating is not really recognised by Government both at a state and local level. Ben writes, “Recreational fishing (and boating) delivers a contribution to the Victorian economy that rivals our State’s best performing agricultural and commercial sectors.” This was revealed in “the Victorian Recreational Fishing Study (2009) that found that the direct expenditure of Victorian recreational fishers totalled \$2.3billion per annum across the state.” This study also found that “recreational fishers spending on average \$250 per fishing trip, and there are usually 3 fishers spending money on any one trip.”

The information from the study when applied to the Gippsland region estimated \$173m contributed from recreational fishing to the region by recreational fishing whilst at the same time providing and it 1,100 jobs in the region. Boating of course adds a further dimension and according to Ben Scullin “ a recent economic input into recreational boating found that recreational boating in just Pt Phillip Bay and Westernport Bays contributed \$1billion per annum and supported 14,340 full time equivalent positions in the Victorian economy. This was estimated to rival the economic contribution of Melbourne Airport, seven times that of the spring racing carnival, and nearly that of the Port of Melbourne. Interestingly the study found that recreational boaters spend an average of \$403 per day in regional Victoria,” and the economic contribution of recreational boating to Victoria was greater than the contribution of organised sporting events and winery tourism combined.

One of the most startling statements from Ben Scullin is that “Our research shows 85% of all recreational vessel registrations are primarily for the purpose of recreational fishing.” The boating contribution when added to the contribution of recreational fishing produces an enormous economic boost to regional areas, and probably one of this states most important boating/fishing areas could be the Gippsland Lakes area, the biggest estuary in Victoria.

The Boating Industry Association believe “the economic contribution from recreational boating activity and industry in the Gippsland lakes region will be more than “Substantial” and we are actively pursuing the funding to answer this important question. On the flip side, it is important to recognise that the negative impact of decisions that curtail recreational fishing and boating activity will have an order of magnitude effect on the regional economy that is out of proportion with the intent of the decision.”

Editor-

I thank Ben Scullin for his contribution on behalf of the Boating Industry Association, which adds to an understanding of the value of recreational fishing and boating to the economy of this state and to regional areas in particular.

The Gippsland Lakes provide a special challenge, if they are to become the fishing and boating hub of this state, and some real commitment must be forthcoming from the Government, similar to the commitment to Eildon and the Nagambie Lakes.

Mercury in the Gippsland Lakes and Catchment

The following article was contributed by Ross Scott a long time resident in this area, who is well qualified to comment on this issue given he was Consulting Engineer for the Latrobe and Thomson River Management Trusts and later General Manager of the Lake Wellington Rivers Management Board that managed all the waterways of West Gippsland. As well he was manager of the Snowy River Rehabilitation Trial Project. Ross has had a long interest in the health of the Gippsland Lakes. Ross writes-

“In 1978-79 the Fisheries and Wildlife Division of Arthur Rylah Institute carried out a study into heavy metals in the biota and sediment of the Gippsland Lakes. The research was published in 1980.

They found that the concentration of mercury in the sediments of the lakes had increased to the point where lakes King and Victoria were significantly higher than tests from other parts of the world. The study found relatively high concentrations of mercury throughout the lakes sediment and biota, and authorities were alerted to the risk of re-dissolving or resuspending mercury by dredging or by increasing the pH (Salinity).

The study identified the load of mercury in the catchment from historic sources to be in the order of 130 tonne. Goldmining (76t); Australian Paper (14t); and Coal Fired Power Stations (40t) that also have a continuing input at more than 2 tonnes per annum into the Lakes catchment.

No action was taken on the report recommendations

In 1998 Gippsland Coastal Board retained the CSIRO to review the water quality of the Gippsland lakes. The Audit reported that: “ The mercury problem does require further investigation, as the evidence indicates rising mercury levels in fish: and sediment concentrations are approaching alarmingly high levels.” Later the report recommended, “Further investigation and research on mercury sources, sinks and cycling is required to enable more effective management of what might be a public health problem.”

Responsible authorities took no action.

In 1999 a study was published by Fabris entitled “ Mercury and organochlorines in black bream in the Gippsland Lakes.” Fabris stated, “The main concentrations of mercury in black bream is now 58% higher than that recorded in 1978.”

He further reported, “Mercury emissions from coal powered fire stations is now thought to be responsible for the elevated levels in methyl mercury detected since 1980. Investigation is required as there is potential for mercury levels in black bream to increase further if atmospheric deposition from coal burning is the source of mercury in the Gippsland Lakes.”

In 2007 nine dolphins were reported to have died from mercury poisoning. Another seven dolphins have died since making approximately 30% of the lakes dolphin population considered to be around 50. In 2010 the Lakes dolphins were identified as a new species.

The results of these studies highlight potentially serious human health risks, and it is of concern that recommendations to conduct further investigation have been ignored.

Possibly the new Ministerial Advisory Committee will have the resources and commitment to constructively manage these issues.”

Editor

Thanks to Ross Scott for this brief look at the research into mercury in the Gippsland Lakes and its effect on black bream. I can add that the chairman of the EPA Mr Mick Bourke wrote to me in 2004 in reply to a letter on this issue stating that alternate funding was being sourced to examine the 40% rise since the 1980's in the level of mercury in black bream, however nothing further was done. This matter was pursued by Peter Hall MLC with the Minister of the day with no result. I wrote at the time in Issue 3 of this publication, “the real issue of ascertaining the current levels of mercury in black bream seems lost.” I see no reason to change that view.

Protection of Spawning Fish at River Mouths

At the last election the Government gave a commitment to protect spawning fish at the mouth of rivers. Unfortunately since the election nothing has been heard of this commitment, and the lack of action has resulted in another massive removal of spawning black bream in the 2011/12 floods, with mesh netting within 400 metres of the river mouths. Today 99% of black bream enter the rivers to spawn, and the removal of the spawning fish in flood events is a tragedy for the stock of black bream which are at a historically low level in the Gippsland Lakes. Surely it can't be that hard to remove commercial netting

from the mouth of rivers. The delay in introducing this commitment has resulted in a further blow to bream stocks.

The following gives an indication of the effects of commercial netting on black bream stocks in the last decade.

Some Statistics to Ponder

The release of the 2011/12 commercial catch statistics at the recent Black Bream Stock Assessment brought into stark reality the effect of flood events on the commercial catch of black bream. The catch in 2012, a flood year was 96 tonnes of black bream almost doubling the catch of the previous year, and this equates to a catch of 96,000 1 kilo spawning black bream that were forced from the river by the fresh water. The value of this catch to commercial fishermen was over \$1m for fish that brought \$11 per kilogram whilst the 2007 and 2011/12 flood events combined provided a return of \$2.3m to commercial fishermen with the removal of the equivalent of 250,000 1 kilo black bream. These figures just provide an indication of the effect of flood events on black bream stocks and of course the real number of fish is probably closer to 400,000. Without flood events the average catch of black bream per annum in commercial nets 2002-2012 would have been in the vicinity of 38 tonnes per annum, but include the two flood events and the average catch rises to 54 tonnes per annum. The actual value of the black bream catch for the last ten years was \$5.5m.

Whilst these are the bare facts of the commercial catch of black bream they take no account of the long term effect of the removal of this number of spawning bream in a flood vent where the females are capable of producing a million eggs in a season or the overall removal of black bream in commercial nets from the Gippsland Lakes.

I accept responsibility for this short analysis based on published commercial catch statistics.

Chief Ranger of Parks Victoria Responds on the Issue of Sea Spurge

The following is a letter (31st August 2012) from Will McCutcheon Chief Ranger (East Gippsland) who provides the Parks Victorias view on this plant and its spread in the Gippsland Lakes area. The spread of this plant was brought to the notice of this newsletter by a letter from a reader.

Dear Lynton

Parks Victoria is concerned about Sea Spurge (Euphorbia paralias). Within East Gippsland District, from Sale to Mallacoota this weed is widespread along the coast and occurs in some inland waterways including the Gippsland Lakes. Its seeds are buoyant and are viable for up to two years in salt water so it spreads readily with wave and tide action.

Parks Victoria has an established program for control of this species and other coastal invasive species in high value conservation areas such as the Gippsland lakes. We utilise state and federal funding programs grouped under our "Protecting the Best" program that is conducted in partnership with the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority. In East Gippsland control works have been undertaken from Cape Howe to the Gippsland lakes, while other arms of Parks Victoria also treat this invasive plant where it occurs along the Victorian coastline.

Given the widespread nature of the plant and its rapid re-colonisation of dunes following treatment, priority is given to those areas where it may affect significant natural values. For example we carry out control in estuary entrances where the threatened Little Tern nests as this weed is capable of transforming the structure of the beach and displacing native vegetation therefore disrupting shorebird habitat.

Parks Victoria also prioritises areas where the weed has invaded inland waters such as the Gippsland lakes to try to contain the spread to the coastal strip. Chemical control programs are being carried out at Second Blow Hole, First Blow Hole, Entrance Bay and Rigby Island within the Gippsland Lakes system.

Volunteers make a significant contribution to the overall control program by conducting hand removal in a number of areas including Croajingolong National Park and Cape Conran National Park, which adds great value to our formal programs. Our aim with this weed species is to control its spread to current known populations, and as funding becomes available, reduce its impact on areas of high natural value.

It is important to recognise that Sea spurge is one of a broad number of invasive pest animals and plants where genuine efforts are being made to minimise its impact with the assistance of volunteer community groups. Other invasive weeds being treated include Arum lily, Dolicos pea, and Blue Periwinkle.

If you or any of your readers are interested in assisting with the control of Sea spurge or other coastal weeds, I would encourage them to join with a volunteer group such as the Friends of the Gippsland Lakes who undertake control work. Parks Victoria would also appreciate reports of new occurrences of this plant.

I do ask you to note and advise your readers that Euphorbia plants have a sticky milky sap that can be harmful if contacted, so care must be taken in handling these plants.

Yours sincerely

Will McCutcheon

Chief Ranger (East Gippsland)

Editor-Thanks to Will McCutcheon for this information on the spread of this invasive weed, and the position of Parks Victoria. It is surprising that the DPI is not also conducting programs to control this weed, however we were informed that it has not been declared noxious, and no current programs are being undertaken. (See issue 60 and 61) Of course the real problem would seem to be a lack of funding for a program that would remove this weed.

Odd Bits and More

Recreational fishing Grants Working Group

The appointment of the new Recreational Fishing Grants Group, that is the body who provides advise to the Minister on the allocation of funds derived from recreational anglers licence fees is well underway and it is expected that members including the chairman would be appointed by the end of September. This Working Group is said to represent the diversity in the recreational fishing community. It comprises eight persons plus an independent chairperson. The membership is said to cover coastal, estuarine, native fish, and salmonoid recreational fisheries, and geographical areas of the state. It contains one person nominated by VRFish to provide advice and reflect the views of that body, and one person involved in the recreational fishing industry business section.

I am indebted to the Department of Primary Industry for this information, however I am unable to provide a single name of the persons representing recreational anglers in advising the Minister as to the allocation of the recreational angler contribution to fisheries in this state.

I am advised, “the names of the Recreational Fishing Grants Working Group are not published to protect the independent integrity of grant applications.”

So recreational anglers will never know who represents them on this working group. This raises the question of open Government, and whether the membership of this Working Group needs the protection of being an anonymous body to maintain the integrity of grant applications. I also wonder how many other bodies advising Government Ministers are cloaked in such secrecy.

Prawn Stocking of Lake Tyers.

Very little information has been made available to anglers on this project, which was allocated \$232,000 from Recreational Fishing Licence Funds. In a Fisheries Newsletter (Fish Fax) of the 18th July 2011 stated, “the production of a productivity model for Lake Tyers will be a key milestone to achieve for October 2012.”

I am indebted to Chris Padovani (Project Officer Statutory Consultation DPI) for the following update.

“The Eastern King Prawn stocking project is currently in the second year of operation, with the first years sampling complete, as well as the first stage of the environmental risk assessment.

Laboratory experiments on prawn bio-energetics is in its final stage of completion This experiment will measure energy use by prawns which will be used to refine stocking densities using three different models. A translocation application will be submitted to Fisheries Victoria during September. All things

being equal, Eastern King Prawns will be ordered, disease tested, transported and released into Lake Tyers during November/December 2012.

Prawns will be sampled during four field trips in Year Three to monitor growth and survival, and the recreational catch monitored through the existing angler diary program run by Fisheries Research Branch. Captured Eastern King Prawns will be genotyped using existing methods to determine whether they are of hatchery or wild origin.

A research report will be published at the completion of the project and made publicly available via the DPI website”

A Cup of Coffee and a Prediction

The other morning I was having a cup of coffee with Kevin Barling a commercial bait fisherman with a lifetime of experience on the Gippsland Lakes. Kevin was saying that in the past twelve months commercial fishermen in the Lakes had a major catch of ocean garfish, and this together with a better than average recreational whiting season he felt was due to the greater salinity and inflow of seawater, with the increasing depth of the entrance to the Gippsland Lakes. This led to his prediction that in the next couple of years increased numbers of ocean fish including salmon, tailor, and trevally might enter the Gippsland Lakes and add to the recreational fishery available to anglers. If this were to occur we might see an alternative to the current black bream fishery which is at a historical low level and the declining dusky flathead fishery in the Gippsland Lakes.

When Kevin mentioned the garfish in the lakes my mind turned to Lake Tyers 10-20 years ago, when one would always see anglers, generally the older variety, fishing from their boats in the main lake area for garfish. I have not seen an angler specifically fishing for garfish with float and berley in the last five or more years.

The other place you might see specific garfish anglers was off the bank at Nowa Nowa, and again these were generally older anglers with their chair and white bucket, and at times this area produced prolific catches of this species for these anglers.

Fishing Ban for Obstructing a Fisheries Officer

A 55 year-old Pt Cook man has been convicted and fined \$1500 for obstructing a Fisheries Officer attempting to inspect his vehicle near Alexandra earlier this year. In January this year the man and his son were fishing for trout near Acheron. When returning to his vehicle with his son he was intercepted by a Fisheries Officer and an inspection of the car boot revealed 5 fish. The man was informed he was to be subject to a further inspection of the boot, however the man shut the boot on five separate occasions and refused the officer access before driving away. Police assistance was called but the man could not be located. The man was later tracked down and faced court. On top of being convicted and fined the man was prohibited from fishing or possessing recreational fishing equipment on or next to Victorian waters for the next twelve months.

Northern Victorian Regional Fisheries Officer Mike Hosking said Fisheries Officers had significant powers of inspection and seizure and fishers were required by law to agree to their requests for inspection.

Source Media Release 13th September 2012

VRFish and Communication

I had not received the monthly VRFish newsletter for neither several months, nor any other communication from VRFish and wondered at this lack of communication with anglers. I contacted the Executive Officer Christopher Collins and found out that the small secretariat had two recent resignations and the lack of a Monthly newsletter was a direct result of this. The Executive Officer is writing a letter on a weekly basis to Board and State Council members, and is hoping these members will distribute matters of interest to anglers. I have offered to provide any information he supplies to readers of this publication, as the most important task of VRFish is to inform anglers of matters that affect them and their sport.

For instance I was unaware that “On Saturday 1st September, We fish, GFAV, and VRFish members along with 1,200 concerned recreational fishers towing more than 300 boats from as far away as Gippsland, and Portland took part in a “tow past” over the Westgate Bridge terminating at the Altona boat ramp.

The Margiris recently arrived into Port Lincoln and the ship has now been re-flagged as an Australian vessel and renamed the Abel Tasman. It will be targeting 18,000 tonnes of Jack mackerel, redbait and blue mackerel with an option of a further 18,000 tonnes.”(Executive Officer VRFish)

On another matter of general interest.

The SW District Assoc. of Angling Clubs met a couple of weeks ago and “ a proposal was put forward to suspend the stocking of brown trout into Lakes Purrumbete and Bullen Merri for a period of two years and replace the stocking effort with rainbow trout and Chinook salmon. The proposal was strongly supported by all the angling associations as they were all very keen to see the crater lakes return as a great Chinook salmon fishery.” The fast growing rainbow would provide an immediate fishery, whilst the Chinook salmon and brown trout, which are slower growing, matured, and grew to catchable size.

(Executive Officer VRFish)

Editor-

It would seem that if a weekly letter is made available to Board and State Council members on the activities of VRFish during that week it should not be too difficult for that letter to be emailed to all recipients of the former monthly newsletter. A weekly VRFish News Update has great appeal and would cost little, particularly when issues such as the super trawler are a major public concern and other matters such as the actions of PETA which has the potential to affect recreational fishing in the future and is currently conducting a subversive campaign against fishing.

PETA and Fishing

PETA or People for the ethical Treatment of Animals have released a video showing a screaming girl watching a man beat her mother, an attacker grabbing an elderly woman’s blouse, and a bloodied schoolboy being kicked to the ground. It then shows a chopping board with a fish on it, opening its mouth with the words “some screams cannot be heard. This has been viewed almost 52,000 times on You Tube according to Michael Lallo writing for the Age. PETA is also urging supporters to write to celebrity chefs such as Gordon Ramsey calling on them to put down the knife. Spokes persons for women’s rights have regarded this advertisement as unethical, however Claire Fryer of PETA defended the campaign as “an effort to instil empathy for animals, specifically fish that are widely misunderstood.”

PETA further stated “billions of fish are dragged suffocating from the oceans or farmed in filthy, severely crowded fish farms, treated in ways that would warrant cruelty to animals charges if the victims were dogs or cats.”

This is not the first time PETA has attacked fishing. In 2004 “Fishing Hurts.Com” was a specific campaign targeting both recreational and commercial fishing. This program was largely based in the USA and it attacked commercial netting, aquaculture and recreational fishing on the basis that “fish suffer greatly when caught and killed for their flesh. Whether caught by hook or net, fish experience fear as evidenced by increased heart and breathing rates – just as humans do.”

Anglers can expect to hear much more from this radical animal rights group in the future as they attack both commercial and recreational fishing.

Australian Cats Live High on Fish

This item was from the newsletter of the South East Trawl Fishing Industry Association and it is produced monthly. In a study by De Silva and Turchini it is stated that Australian cats eat 33,500 tonnes of seafood per annum. This according to the SETFIA newsletter is twice the catch of the southern east trawl. The article also suggests the demand for pet food is growing with increasing urbanisation and it suggests with increasing standards of living pet owners are treating their cats as members of the family and consequently expenditure on pet food is growing. The SETFIA newsletter points out that “ Australia’s Commonwealth Fisheries are managed under sustainable quotas that are recommended by scientists and set by an independent Commission. Demand for seafood products is not considered when setting quotas.”

A Moment In History

In July 1932 when the introduction of a fishing or rod licence was being discussed a large meeting of Gippsland anglers was held in Traralgon to oppose this introduction with the strongest condemnation led

by the Gippsland Angling Clubs Association. The following is a report of the sentiments expressed by the anglers at that meeting. .

“We are rapidly reaching a state when we will be worse off than in the days of the black... It is class legislation of the worst type. For the Piscatorial Council to sponsor a move that will do away with the great spirit of sportsmanship amongst the rich and the poor of the country ... is against the spirit of the empire... in a few years the true angler would be as scarce as the Bunyip or the dodo... would turn the honest angler into a poacher...is getting back to the bad old days of Rupert Dawes. The next thing the Chief Secretary would want to do is find an island, to which the breakers of the game law could be deported.”

Now that's a radical group of anglers!!!!

From John Clements excellent book “Salmon in the Antipodes”

Submission on Proposed Regulations for Dusky Flathead

I have recently heard that strong support has come from anglers for the draft proposal on dusky flathead. (see last issue)The following is a submission that I wrote to Fisheries Victoria supporting the draft proposals for dusky flathead. I provide this submission to readers as it provides the reasons many anglers are supporting the draft regulations in the hope this decision will ensure the iconic dusky flathead fishery of East Gippsland survives for future generations of anglers.

Regarding the proposed measures for dusky flathead.

This proposal has my full support, for as a regular angler fishing Lake Tyers I have seen a marked decline in the numbers of large flathead. Ten years ago I would have close to 10 dusky flathead over 10lbs in my annual catch. (I released fish over 55cms) In the 2011/12 seasons I did not catch one fish over 10lbs. In 1996 I had a 15lb dusky flathead and my wife caught a 14 lb fish. (These were mounted and are on the walls in my home. A decision we both regret, but we did not have the knowledge that followed the release of the NSW Gray and Barnes Report (2008) emphasizing the importance of large female dusky flathead).

Since that time I have not seen one fish of that size. Today an angler is lucky if he sees a fish over 60cms, and suddenly, as anglers we had concerns about the future of the fishery.

Anglers had sought a minimum size increase and protection for the large female flathead previously, and this was put to Fisheries Victoria in anglers submissions suggesting a slot size, when discussions were taking place during the development of the 2007 Lake Tyers Fisheries Management Plan. No change to flathead minimum size limits or protection for large breeding fish were included in this plan, and this may well have been due to a lack of any understanding of the Lake Tyers fishery by the Steering Committee appointed by Fisheries Victoria. (Not one local angler was appointed to this Steering Committee)

It was suggested in the response to anglers submissions that the queries regarding dusky flathead would be examined in the 2008 Regulation Review.

In this 2008 review despite anglers requests, the minimum size limit was only increased by 2cms, which achieved nothing, and no change was made to the bag limit of five flathead with one over 60cms. Anglers were again disappointed, as the new regulations provided no protection to this iconic species that was under intense pressure with the success of plastic lures and direct targeting of the species by an ever-increasing number of anglers. Dusky flathead had become a most sought after species.

The case for protection of dusky flathead was strongly put by the late Peter Spehrs a recreational angler and VICTAG worker who had tagged over 5000 dusky flathead in Lake Tyers and who wrote in 2008 suggesting that no fish over 70cms should be retained by anglers. His writing sums up the view of many anglers when he says-

“The majority of anglers are practicing catch and release of these large specimens and would embrace such a change.

They are our big breeding fish and should be protected for that reason alone.

We are proposing in this same regulation review to protect large Murray Cod and we should be doing the same for Dusky Flathead.

These big fish are not in abundance and with the current angling pressure through the success of soft plastics there is evidence from Mallacoota and other eastern Victorian estuaries that the number of these large fish is declining.

They are far more valuable than to be only caught once from an eco tourism point of view.

They are poor eating quality.

They are an iconic fish. Just take a look in the fishing magazines and you will see what I mean. From an eco tourism point of view they draw in the anglers as our Far East Coast tributaries demonstrate. They are also a rare capture to many anglers and should be put back to give other anglers an opportunity to catch the same fish and realize the same thrill. Tagging efforts clearly demonstrate these large fish successfully survive re release. Based on VICTAG records at least one dusky flathead in Lake Tyers has now been caught and released 4 times.

My suggestions are a recipe not only for saving Dusky Flathead fish stocks but also for creating one of the healthiest, most sustainable recreational fisheries in the state. As recreational anglers we are well ready for these changes”.

I am sure Peter Spehr, would if he were with us today strongly endorse the draft and see this as a major achievement. I also endorse that view.

As an angler I have appreciated Fisheries Victoria listening to anglers realising the problem and working towards a solution with anglers. The meetings at Lakes Entrance and Mallacoota were a new way of reaching a solution to a problem, and Travis Dowling the Fisheries Manager, involved in achieving this solution deserves the congratulations of anglers.

We now hope that these steps will be accepted and we can see this wonderful species provide anglers with challenging fishing into the future, and those large spawning females are left to provide a basis for this fishery.

As with all proposals some aspects cause concern, and for most recreational anglers the non application of this draft to commercial fishing in the Gippsland Lakes will see a major decline in the dusky flathead of this system, which in turn will put more fishing pressure on Lake Tyers and Mallacoota. With the decline of the Gippsland Lakes recreational fishery this is occurring already. We would hope this iconic species would receive the same protection in the Gippsland Lakes as it receives in other East Gippsland waters and I am sure that this will be a matter for future debate.

This draft is a major step to creating one of the healthiest most sustainable recreational fisheries in the state. As recreational anglers we are well ready for these changes.

Quotable Quotes of Gippsland Lakes Commercial Fishers

Re Black Bream

“There are literally millions and millions of them, I would see them day after day, showing there is little or nothing wrong with the Gippsland Lake system. Anyone who says there is no fish or recruitment is very uninformed.”

Commercial Spokesperson

Bairnsdale Advertiser August 29th 2008

“I have had reports from other commercial fishers that suggest huge numbers of small bream. I am of the view the longer this algae remains the better for the bream fishery. I am predicting a spike in bream numbers comparable to the late seventies.”

Next Issue of Around the Jetties

The next issue of Around the Jetties will be the November issue due to a planned October cruise to New Zealand with the publisher of this newsletter. We were going to miss the October issue, however I thought the Black Bream Assessment 2012, and other contributions should get to readers now rather than later. We aim at ten issues per year and with this issue we have already produced ten issues.

Contributions- Your contributions thoughts and letters to this angling newsletter are most welcome and important and we look forward to publishing your items of interest and if necessary seeking answers to queries..

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. We do not advertise but rely on readers talking to others and the number of readers just continues to increase..

Thanks To those readers of hard copy who have forwarded stamps or donated funds for printing. Your thoughtful assistance is greatly appreciated, as with the success of the publication the costs of production have greatly increased.

***Good Health and good fishing
Lynton Barr***