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Around the Jetties

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An Anglers Newsletter

“The charm of fishing is that it is the pursuit of what is elusive but attainable, a perpetual series of occasions for hope.”

John Buchan author of “The 39 Steps and other classic stories.”

Editorial

This edition draws the attention of anglers to some of the items in the Auditor General’s Report on the Management of Freshwater Fisheries. The critical conclusions of this report suggest the Department of Primary Industry (Fisheries) is not discharging its responsibilities in providing a sustainable outcome for freshwater fisheries in this state. There are some gaps and problems, evidenced in the report, including the need for greater business and strategic planning and performance indicators, and management plans. However, with adequate staffing and funding I am sure the recommendations of the Auditor general could be met. Anglers in this state are well served by Fisheries Victoria and its management, particularly given the current economic stringency. Anglers in this state would have welcomed some acknowledgement of that fact in the report.

Auditor General Questions Management of Freshwater Fisheries

In a 35 page report entitled the “Management of Freshwater Fisheries” released in March, the Auditor General concluded that the *“Department of Primary Industry is not discharging its legislative responsibilities to deliver balanced and sustainable outcomes for recreational freshwater fisheries.”* It further stated that whilst delivering improved recreational fishing outcomes, Fisheries Victoria is not paying sufficient attention to the conservation and protection of ecological processes and habitats. The report suggests that Fisheries Victoria *“has increasingly relied on artificial stocking programs without assessing the impact of this activity.”* The report also questions whether the current approach is the way to protect fishery resources for future generations.

The report queries the reliance of Fisheries Victoria on data about fish catches as recorded by anglers, (Angler Diary program), as being limited to specific areas and species. I would have thought this approach would have had audit approval as a cost effective method of obtaining information. The report is strong on suggesting “strategic plans,” “management plans” “performance indicators,” and “data management systems” all of which would require an enormous amount of time and I would wonder at the value of this expenditure of time.

Some statements in the report I find difficult to understand and the following is an example-

“Despite the significant social and economic benefits derived from stocking Victorian waters, it has the potential to threaten the biodiversity and ecological integrity of fishery habitats and therefore the sustainability of the fishery.”

No evidence or examples are provided to support this suggestion that stocking has the potential to destroy the sustainability of the fishery, and this would be my criticism of the entire report. Statements are made critical of Fisheries Victoria, without any evidence being provided, on almost every page. The report is also critical of research priorities and projects undertaken by Fisheries Victoria.

The only waters in East Gippsland covered in this report are covered by the 2012 East Gippsland Management Plan and this plan includes the Mitchell River, Tambo River, and Snowy River as well as other rivers to the east. Again, the

Audit report is critical of these management plans stating **“Fishery Management Plans are poorly developed, implemented and monitored”** and I think many anglers might agree with this evaluation.

However, in my view many of the problems have stemmed from the membership of the Planning Committees. The Audit does comment on the working of the **Reference Groups** whose role is overseeing monitoring and reporting on the performance of management plans. These committees are required to meet at least once a year. This publication has, on a number of occasions, drawn attention to the Lake Tyers Management Plan Reference Group, which has met only once in almost six years of the plans operation, so this is a valid criticism. The calling of meetings of this group is the responsibility of the senior fisheries officer, and this, it would seem has not been monitored by Fisheries Victoria.

The Audit report is also critical of decisions made regarding stocking which it suggests are not **“supported by robust scientific information.”** This criticism applies less to small single species stocking but is rather directed at **“the ongoing more complex stocking that DPI regularly and increasingly undertakes.”** Again, no stocking program is specified. It would be fair to suggest that the stocking program receives considerable emphasis, and I think anglers would support the stocking program, and hope the comments of the audit do not mean a decline in stocking in this state.

It would be the hope of most anglers that the result of the audit does not mean our Fisheries Victoria will become bogged in paperwork to the detriment of other practical operations. I can recall that only 3-4 years ago, scientific reports were held up often for almost a year following preparation and this publication drew attention to such delays.

In recent times under new Directors, Fisheries Victoria has had reports quickly released, and lines of communication with anglers established. A sense of energy and enthusiasm has been developed within Fisheries that has brought recreational anglers and Fisheries Victoria into a closer working relationship. The audit does not make any reference to what I would suggest is an outstanding administrative team. I would make the observation that I believe to satisfy the requirements of this report additional staff and funding would be needed.

Finally, the audit cost \$290,000. Perhaps that is enough detail of this report other than to say, the audit report would be far easier to understand if the sources of information upon which recommendations were made were disclosed.

Identifying the Dusky Flathead



In the 2013 Recreational Fishing Guide, it is specified that, “any flathead caught in Lake Tyers or in any estuary east of Lake Tyers would be a dusky flathead.” This leaves the need to identify any flathead caught in the Gippsland Lakes as a dusky flathead or the Southern blue spotted flathead (yank) both of which occur in this water. Ron Brymer who has written for this newsletter wrote in October 2009 that-

“I can confirm a very healthy population of (“yanks”) in the Gippsland Lakes, and I don’t think they are distributed any further along the system than Metung. I have personally caught them to 4-5lb and 60cms plus.”

The problem for anglers is that it is difficult differentiate between dusky flathead and the Southern blue spotted flathead. Whilst strict controls are in place for dusky flathead with a five fish bag limit and a slot size between 30 and 55cms, the bag limit for the Southern blue spot (yank) is 20 fish with a minimum size limit of 27cms and no maximum size.

This was a problem identified several years ago, and research angler John Harrison of the Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club undertook considerable research on this issue, which was published in issue 48 (July 2011). The following article is an abridged version of the original John Harrison article and is reprinted for anglers who may not have had access to this newsletter in 2011.

John Harrison - Research Angler Lake Tyers

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.

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 19th 2011. 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.

Editor (The 2013 Recreational Fishing Guide relies on the tail spot markings to distinguish between dusky flathead and Southern blue spotted flathead.)

It was accepted by the Senior Fisheries managers present that the criteria for identifying yanks and duskies 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 duskies and yanks (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.)

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).”

Editor

Special thanks to John Harrison for his work on the identification of dusky and blue spot flathead.

It is most pleasing that Fisheries Victoria changed the regulations on the size limit for dusky flathead (November 2012) based on the research undertaken in NSW, local research, and the information supplied by anglers, who fish for dusky flathead in East Gippsland waters and who were aware of the declining stock. It was also pleasing to see that all flathead taken in estuaries from Lake Tyers to the NSW border are deemed to be dusky flathead and the new regulations apply.

What remains unresolved is the difficulty of identification between dusky flathead and the Southern blue spot in the Gippsland Lakes where both species exist, and different bag and size limits apply. Just to make it more difficult I was talking recently to a Fisheries Officer who said he believed there were also hybrid dusky and Southern blue spot flathead in the Gippsland Lakes.!!!! Perhaps this indicates just how little we know about this important recreational species.

A simple resolution of this problem would be to extend the regulation that all flathead caught east of and including the Gippsland Lakes are regarded as dusky flathead, and the current regulations applying to dusky flathead would apply to all flathead caught in the Gippsland Lakes. This is proposed in the John Harrison article. This would have the effect of protecting the flathead stock and remove the confusion that currently exists with identifying the species of flathead caught in the Gippsland Lakes

It is worth noting here that in the Gippsland Lakes, the ten commercial fishermen have no quota limit for dusky flathead and no maximum size limit, and this perhaps is another anomaly that needs attention by Fisheries Victoria.



The flathead in the centre displays a very different coloration of the tail to the fish illustrated in the 2013 Fishing Guide. In the photo the spots are at the top of the tail, whilst those of the Southern blue spot are at the base and the dusky has a large single spot towards the top of the tail. Could this be a hybrid? Recognition using coloration of the tail does not distinguish the varieties of flathead, and the Gippsland Lakes anglers are facing an impossible task in deciding the species of flathead.

As I was writing this section, I was made aware of the current difficulty of identification.

My son had just returned from fishing soft plastics from his canoe off Nungurner in the Gippsland Lakes. He had kept a 46cm flathead, and released a 59cm flathead because he was not sure of its identification, but it was the same as the smaller fish. The smaller fish had 4-5 blotches on its tail, however they were at the top of the tail (see photo above) and not on the bottom half of the tail as described in the Guide for Southern blue spot, and no single blotch as described in the Recreational Guide (2013) for dusky flathead. We believe after close examination that this fish did not have the distinguishing tail features of either the dusky or blue spot flathead. This morning's examination of this flathead seems to suggest the tail markings of dusky and blue spot flathead are inconsistent and do not provide easily recognisable distinguishing features for the angler. This is a classic demonstration of the ongoing problem in the Gippsland Lakes of flathead identification that requires urgent resolution.

A Meeting with Two Commercial Bait Fishermen



I recently had a meeting, over a cup of coffee, with Kevin Barling and Roger Smith to discuss some of their concerns regarding the bait fishing industry in the Gippsland Lakes and problems they felt were confronting their industry. Both brought a long experience of daily fishing for bait in the lakes and were able to provide a view that is seldom heard by anglers.

Kevin Barling has been fishing the lakes since 1976, and has had a bait licence since 1978, whilst Roger Smith has 47 years experience fishing for bait. I put a number of questions to both Kevin and Roger and the following is a summary of the discussion.

Photo Roger Smith on left - Kevin Barling on right studying maps,

Question- What is the current situation with sandworm in the Gippsland Lakes?

K.B There is currently only one ground to pump sandworm and that is the area of the cut on the Mitchell River, and this is rapidly being fished out, with only very small worm remaining and little future for worm in the lakes.

R.S I doubt if the cut is really workable and can see little future. There is very little sandworm that is saleable.

Question- What is the future for sandworm as bait in the Gippsland Lakes?

K.B. Normally after a flood the number of sandworm explode, however after the 2012 flood there is no indication of any improvement in the quantity of worm in the area of the cut and unless other areas develop it will be difficult to see a sound bait fishery for sand worm.

R.S. There would be improvement in a normal situation; however, the current situation in the lakes seems abnormal. The peaks and lows for sandworm are generally based on floods but that has not occurred.

Question- How many bait licence holders pump in the region of the cut for sandworm.

K.B. There are seven licence holders for bait, however with 5 deckhands you could get 12 pumping this area, and of course a number of the commercial fishermen also have bait licences, however they only pump worm when the worm is very plentiful, and then return to normal fishing when the worm declines.

R.S. This means you could have with the commercial fishermen up to 19 people pumping worm, however with the small amount of saleable worm available this will not happen in the current situation. At the moment, there is insufficient worm to be viable for all of those with bait licences.

K.B. Of course, events like the influx of fire retardant into rivers such as the Mitchell after the 2006 bush fires had an adverse effect on sandworm and even blackfish kills were reported in the Mitchell River at this time.

R.S. At the moment, there is almost no shell and hardly any shrimp in the Gippsland Lakes and this is associated with the lack of seagrass

Question- You both personally undertook a survey in the Gippsland Lakes of sandworm areas based on your long experience.

K.B. Roger and I undertook the start of this simple survey on the 21st December from Wattle Point to Loch Sport and Blonde Bay, which were areas we had formerly pumped worm, and in five hours with numerous stops we were unable to pump a single worm. Many of the areas we attempted to pump were black and smelt, and through this area we did not find a single shell, which were once prolific right through the area.

R.S. We tried the area from Sperm Whale head to east of Raymond Island on the 26th of December with the result of 1 sandworm at Sperm Whale Head. Five years ago in many of these areas we were pumping 3-4 kilos of worm per hour.

K.B. It just seems to us that many areas that previously yielded worm are covered in black smelly material, and at the moment they are stuffed with no worm and no shell. We pumped at around 30 sites for no result.

Question- What do you believe is the reason for this dramatic change?

R.S. Look I have no specific knowledge however these changes seem to have occurred since material from the Morwell open cut mine were pumped into the Latrobe River and then into the Gippsland Lakes. I think they are using the Gippsland Lakes as a sewer.

K.B. We understood there were around 60 pumps operating pumping the water from the mine into the river, and whilst the EPA supposedly tested the water, we can't help but believe the Gippsland Lakes are being degraded by this flow.

Question Have you any supporting evidence for this suggestion.

K.B. We think the fish of the lakes are providing some evidence of material entering the lakes. Fish at this time of the year are normally spread around the lakes, however at the moment fish are entering the rivers, and are under the jetties to escape the flow from the Latrobe River. I have never seen the movement of fish into rivers at this time of year in all my years, and I believe it is an attempt to escape the general flow of the material entering the lake system.

R.S. I have never seen it before at this time of the year, and the lack of fish is also evident when pumping worm. Where small fish were plentiful as one pumped there are almost no fish around when pumping worm today. We believe there is sufficient evidence to warrant a study of just what is occurring in the Gippsland Lakes at this time.

Question. What is the current situation with the level of seagrass?

K.B. There was a massive die back after 2007 flood and I think the die back was as much as 90% of seagrass.

R.S. There are some signs of a small improvement, however the effect on the catching of shrimp with reduced weed beds has been another difficulty for bait fishermen as well as the pressure from the number of bait licences holders fishing for shrimp, and the effect of shrimp netting on the sparse seagrass areas has not helped. What shrimp that have been caught are generally very small.

Question What in your view is the current state of the lakes.

R.S. I get particularly annoyed as I read recently of a member of the Ministerial Advisory Committee describing what great condition the Gippsland Lakes are in. It's about time that bodies told it like it is rather than providing stop gap statements to support tourism. Over the years 70% of tourists have travelled to the Gippsland Lake to fish, and fish stocks are in decline, and there is no indication of improvement.

K.B. Many people look at the Gippsland Lakes and because the water is clear they assume all in the lakes is well, but the true situation is that the Gippsland Lakes are in a disastrous state.

Question-What are the major concerns of bait licence holders

R.S. We hear rumours that the bait licence could be increased from \$800, per annum to as high as \$4,000 as part of a cost recovery program, and given the state of the bait fishery in the Gippsland lakes and the overall decline of bait species, this would mean a decline in bait fishermen. We also have concerns that bait fishermen are not consulted when changes are made that affect their fishery. For example an area near Loch Sport was dredged to provide sand for beaches. Bait fishermen were not informed yet this area had the capacity to provide 40% of the sandworm catch in some years.

K.B. Another aspect is that in discussions with Fisheries Victoria we are included with the ten commercial fishermen of the lakes; however we have much more in common with the recreational anglers and are in reality part of the recreational fishing scene rather than part of the commercial netting industry. Recreational anglers and their bait suppliers are part of the one industry and complement each other.

In a general discussion to conclude Kevin and Roger both talked about the Code of Conduct that bait fishermen introduced some years ago when there were only seven licences in the Gippsland Lakes. The code included an agreement to have a rest day on each Tuesday to conserve worm, to sell worm only between Now Nowa and Sale,

with a six hour pumping limit for licence holders pumping alone and a three hour pumping limit when the licence holder was pumping with a deckhand, again to ensure equity between licence holders and to conserve stock. When Fisheries Victoria increased the number of licence holders from 7-10, against the wishes of the licence holders at the time, the code of conduct, due to increased competition was no longer adhered to by all licence holders and has lapsed.

Perhaps Fisheries Victoria might consider meeting with bait fishermen and representatives of recreational angling to discuss the joint concerns of this sector of the recreational fishery.

Movement of Fish in our Rivers

I recently had a phone call from Clive Blackwood who lives close to the Johnsonville launching ramp and keeps an eye on the Tambo River. Clive reported on large numbers of bream and other species moving into this river and of course readers would be aware of similar reports of fish movement into the Mitchell River. These movements had never occurred at this time of the year in the long experience of the two bait fishermen in the previous item, and certainly a number of anglers who had all of 70 years of experience on the rivers supported the view that this movement was an event they had never seen previously.

I followed these many comments made by anglers with a look at the report on the release of water from the TRUenergy mining pits which were pumping water into the Latrobe River and thus into the Gippsland Lakes following the Latrobe River flooding the open cut.. This 110-page report was prepared by Sinclair Knight and Mertz in September 2012 and reviewed by an EPA auditor to provide the EPA and the public with added confidence in the findings.

The following is part of the Executive Summary.

“The overall finding of the ecological risk assessment is that the discharge of water from the TRUenergy mining pits into the Latrobe River is **a low risk** to the environment and ecology of the Latrobe River and the Gippsland Lakes.

The only **moderate risk** was considered to be turbidity, however the risk is only short term for the duration of the discharge, and the system should recover once the turbidity levels return to background. This is because the biota present in the system are 1) likely to be tolerant of elevated turbidity for the duration of the discharge (5-6 months) and 2) **if impacted will be able to seek refuge in tributary streams and or re-colonisation from other parts of the system. For example fish can recolonise from tributary streams and via upstream migration from the sea (for some species).**”

(Biota-Fish and other animals of the area.)

Editor

Whilst not being a person with much scientific knowledge, the above would seem to indicate that the release of mine water into the Gippsland Lakes could lead to fish seeking refuge from the turbidity (muddy, thick) water entering the river and then into the Gippsland Lakes and, this was a known and an expected possibility according to the Executive Summary of the 2012 report. The terms “low risk” and “moderate risk” are used in the report, but never “No risk” and I find this worrying. This report would seem to support the views of the commercial bait fishermen of the Gippsland Lakes that the movement of fish into the rivers is caused by the fish population moving into areas away from the flow of the Latrobe Rivers turbid water.

A question remains as to whether “the black and smelly “material covering former sandworm beds is a result of the turbid water dropping the material that was held in suspension over the sand beds. I think we need to know far more about the material being pumped into the Latrobe River and then the Gippsland Lakes and any possible long term effects on worm beds, seagrass meadows and fish populations.

(Underlining of this report was my attempt to highlight parts of the summary.)

Odd Bits and More

Little Terns and the Gippsland Lakes

Little terns and Fairy terns, according to the department of Sustainability and Environment, have bred on Rigby Island in the Gippsland Lakes for the first time in thirteen years. “DSE Biodiversity Officer Faye Bedford said 40 little terns and ten fairy terns had fledged this year.” There has been a declining population of these species and it believed that there are only 200 pairs of little terns and 100 pairs of fairy terns in Victoria. Dogs have been banned from Rigby Island, and there had been very little human interference so that these rare birds were able to nest on the sand, lay their eggs and raise their young. These delightful birds formerly nested in the Coorong and the Murray Lakes regions, however foxes destroyed 95% of nests in these areas. According to the Age newspaper that reported the successful breeding on Rigby Island, five years ago the International Union for



is



Conservation of Nature listed the fairy tern as a species in danger of becoming extinct.

Anglers fishing the Gippsland Lakes have been delighted as these small birds dive into the water to get small fish often close to the boat, and then fly off with the fish in the beak. It's to be hoped the little terns and fairy terns that have bred on Rigby Island will return next year and further add to the tern colony on Rigby Island.

Also important was the excellent coverage of this event on ABC Gippsland, the Age Newspaper, and local papers.

Excellence in Support of Research Outcomes

John Kirk was presented with the "Excellence in Support of Research Outcomes" award at the national recreation Fishing Conference on the Gold Coast in August 2012. John has been a keen angler for more than 70 years and has been fishing for bream in East Gippsland since the 1940's and has kept his own detailed diary of every fish he caught in the Bemm River estuary from the 1960's until today.

John's diary became a prototype for the Angler Diary Program of today and John was the first program recruit. The results of John's work are often quoted at conferences involving recreational anglers and are relied upon as a major contribution to understanding breeding patterns of black bream. This publication congratulates John on this deserved award.

(Source- Angler Diary Quarterly Newsletter Issue 16 March 2013)



The Common Flathead

Over Easter, I was surprised to see in a Bairnsdale shops fish section locally caught flathead tails advertised at \$49.99 per kg. Now it's not all that long ago that flathead filets were advertised at the local Co-Op at under ten dollars. The flathead is now a favoured fish for the public. I have been informed by a reader, that we have been very lucky, as they were bringing \$56.00 a kg in some metropolitan fish shops. I and my son, managed to catch half a dozen dusky flathead in Lake Tyers prior to Easter, now they would have yielded probably two kgs of filleted fish and that value suddenly becomes a powerful argument when I suggest I need another rod or more soft plastics to the head of this newsletters printing department. Locally, flathead filets were selling at \$38.99 a kilo, now this certainly means the common flathead are nowhere as common in the scale of eating fish as we previously thought.

Around the Jetties Goes North

I was having a yarn with Dick Hargraves, who is a welding consultant and diver and who brought to us the story of his discovery of a wreck whilst surf fishing off Lake Tyers in 1991, which turned out to be the wreck of the Latrobe, a 37 tonne schooner, and that story was published in Issue 51 (Nov. 2011). Dick has been a reader of Around the Jetties and he indicated that he was sending a copy of each issue to the Thirroul Fishing Club 20kms north of Wollongong and it is then being circulated to club members. This club fishes mainly for snapper and flathead offshore. Thanks to Dick and welcome to readers from this club and also the Coledale Club where issues of Around the Jetties are also circulated.

Jack Loney's book "Wrecks along the Gippsland Coast." provides the following information. "The schooner Latrobe was lost near Lakes Entrance on the 14th March 1878 when she struck the bar and drifted onto the western spit. Her crew stayed on board overnight as the life boat was washed away and they swam to shore next day taking shelter in a deserted hut."

The steamer Rosedale later pulled the Latrobe over on to her side in an effort to salvage her however, they discovered her back was broken, and the boat was left where it had foundered. The article provided by Dick Hargraves was published in the Lakes Post in February 1999.

Habitat Improvement in Local Rivers

Very close to \$1m has been spent in recent years on habitat improvement in the Mitchell, Tambo and Nicholson Rivers, with \$730,000 contributed by anglers commencing in 2001/02 from the Recreational Fishing Licence fees. I can recall in the past when a tree fell into the Tambo River it was only a matter of days until Gippsland Ports had that tree totally removed in the interests of safe navigation. Today that tree would provide additional woody debris (snags) for fish habitat. All of the \$730,000 from licence fees has been provided to the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority to undertake the actual work. \$37,349 was spent to develop estuary perch habitat at the second island in the Snowy River, and there was a trial of placing structural habitat in the Gippsland Lakes however, the remainder has been allocated to local rivers.



Photos show moving logs into position on the Nicholson River and Logs submerged

A major study entitled “Bringing native **fish back** to the rivers”(June 2002) detailing the restoration of wooden debris in the Murray Basin stated “large wooden debris provides important habitat for native species by creating refuge areas and nursery areas for larval and juvenile fish.” I spoke to Jarod Lyon, research scientist with the Arthur Rylah Institute and one of the authors of this study. Jarod has done considerable work on the introduction of wooden debris in the Murray River system and he indicated that almost no research has been done on the effects of wooden debris in the local rivers; however he did acknowledge that it was important that research is undertaken. He suggested I contact Jason Lieschke an Arthur Rylah research scientist who was recently undertaking work in the Nicholson River. Jason explained that whilst not specifically examining the wooden debris in the Nicholson River they did use their sophisticated electro fishing unit, (one of only two in the world), to target some of the wooden debris and were surprised at the number of bream and luderick that were on the snags. Jason felt the structures appeared to be working very well and he was quite excited at the results; however he indicated this was just a small window on the effect of introduced wooden debris, and could only be regarded as anecdotal information until research is undertaken. It would seem essential that a research project is funded in the near future that would demonstrate the effectiveness of the introduction of wooden debris and might set guidelines on locations for future wooden debris introduction into local rivers.

My thanks to Jarod Lyon and Jason Lieschke for their comments and the indication that the wooden debris in local rivers may be working well. (Jason is also an author with Jarrod of the report “Bringing native fish back to rivers.”)

The Grayling An Oft Forgotten Fish



Izaak Walton writing in 1750 in his famous book “The Compleat Angler” wrote of the grayling “*he grows not to the bigness of a trout for the biggest of them do not usually exceed eighteen inches. He lives in such rivers as the trout does, and is usually taken with the same baits as trout does and after the same manner.*”

Whilst once a popular sport fish taken generally on small wet and dry flies, today in Victoria the grayling is totally protected. The numbers of grayling have greatly declined since European settlement. They are interesting in that the young fry are swept down river to estuarine waters where they remain for six months before returning to the river where they spend the rest of their short lives. (6 years)

In the Tambo River system, surveys undertaken during the last twenty years indicate the grayling is relatively more abundant and consistently present in the Tambo River than in other waterways surveyed. The grayling is considered to be a threatened species, so the population in the Tambo River becomes more important and it has been suggested the population of this species in the Tambo River “influences the distribution and abundance of the species at least across the Eastern Victorian Rivers.

Source Heritage River Draft Management Plan Vol 4 Gippsland / Cadwallader & Backhouse “Freshwater Fish of Victoria “

Nicholson Dam “In Mothballs”

Readers will recall that it was proposed that the Nicholson River dam be removed and this would provide access for fish from the upper reaches of the river to move to the estuary. I reported in Issue 58 June 2012 that research was taking place as to the best method of removal. Since that time 30,000 Australian bass have been released in the river above the dam. I heard a rumour of some difficulties with the removal of the dam and contacted a spokesperson for East Gippsland Water. I was informed that the project had been “mothballed” due to a total lack of funds. It has been suggested from another source that the cost could be as much as \$4m to remove the dam. This of course means that the bass stocked in the Nicholson River will not be able to move to the estuary to spawn, and this will preclude the growth in the number of bass from natural spawning in the Nicholson River. This situation unless resolved must make the stocking of a further 66,000 bass a questionable proposition. I spoke to local member Tim Bull on this matter and he stated, “It is my intention to follow up on the situation with the dam in the coming weeks.”

Unless this dam is removed, the bass stocked in the Nicholson River will not become a breeding colony and provide for the future. May 2012, local member Tim Bull was quoted in the Lakes Entrance News as saying “With the decommissioning of the Nicholson dam, this move to stock around 33,000 fingerlings per year over the next three years is good news.” I would think the key to good news would be the removal of the dam.

Australian bass must have salt water to breed, and increased construction of weirs and dams on coastal streams has had a significant impact on bass numbers.”(Australian Fish Guide by Frank Prokop.)

Early Australian Angling

In the book “Two years in New South Wales” written by Peter Cunningham, Surgeon in the Royal Navy published in 1827, the following description of angling was described. *“A vast variety of fish teem in our rivers, but the perch is the species oftenest put into requisition by the settler on this side of the Blue Mountains and the river cod in the country beyond. The Australian Perch resembles however the English perch only in appearance; they abode everywhere in our eastern coast rivers: yet they are not more bony than a trout, while in flavour, juiciness, and delicacy of eating, they bear a close analogy to the sole.”* Most fishermen now know Cunningham’s Australian Perch, as the estuary perch and the bass. These fish were one of the few species early settlers could take on the fly.

(Source “Salmon at the Antipodes by John Clements)

Letters Letters Letters.

Re Sea Spurge

I received this letter from Shane Elmore Project officer of the Conservation volunteers on the 4th April.

Hi Lynton

“I would like to ask your readers if they could undertake whilst they are out fishing a survey on Sea Spurge (Euphorbia paralias). I would like to put together an eradication program for East Gippsland and into the Gippsland region.

Location and extent of infestation information would be great. If they can supply GPS coordinates even better. All information can be sent through me at the details below”

Shane Elmore (Project Officer East Gippsland)

Conservation volunteers Australia

574 Main St Bairnsdale 3875

Phone 03 5152 0680 Mobile 0417 742 301

selmore@conservationvolunteers.com.au

Editor

A reader of this publication first drew the community’s attention to the increasing problem of Sea Spurge. I am sure that readers will now provide information to Conservation Volunteers so that an attack can be made on this weed. The reader who raised this issue suggested it would be uncontrollable in two years if no action is taken.(Issue 60 August 2012) Chief ranger (East Gippsland) Will McCutcheon did contact me and indicate some work was being undertaken particularly in areas where the spread of the weed may affect breeding sites of the Little tern.(Issue 62 October 2012) whilst in December 2012 Wendy Parker (President)Friends of the Parks and Reserves of the Gippsland Lakes group indicating as a result of our readers letter Parks Vic were becoming more aware of the threat of the weed. The “Friends” tackled this weed in the area of Steamer Landing. The report in Around the Jetties featured in the ABC morning program with Gerard Callinan

Now readers, its up to us to inform the Conservation Volunteers Project Officer of areas of infestation of this weed in the Gippsland Lakes. We include a photo to help with identification.



Spanish Mackerel in the Gippsland Lakes?

I received this letter from Geoff Trusler of Hawthorn on the 24th March. Readers might recall previous correspondence from Geoff, and the fact that he provided the wonderful tourist fishing reports from the late 1980's that vividly demonstrate the decline in fish numbers in local rivers. On this occasion Geoff draws our attention to a Lakes Entrance web site fishing report.

"Hello Lynton

I have typed below an extract from the fishing report on the www.lakesentrance.com website of March the 22nd 2013.

"Lakes entrance: flathead, salmon and Spanish mackerel are biting opposite Nyerimilang Park using pilchard, prawn and metal lures."

Geoff asks, "just wondering whether you thought I would be able to handle these Spanish Mackerel on my Jimmy Crane light bream rods and 4lb mono line or, seeing as they grow to approx 45kgs, should I upgrade my gear to a Penn International on a fully rolled game rod with heavy metal trace.

I look forward to your advice

Geoff."



Editor

As always I am delighted to get any correspondence from Geoff Trusler. The report that Geoff refers to was repeated in the Bairnsdale Advertiser of the 25th of March under the banner heading **A Taste of Spain**, and then on Wednesday March 27th the exact same report was printed under the heading **Nyerimilang Nibblers** in the Lakes Entrance Post.

I looked up Spanish Mackerel in Roughly's "Fish and Fisheries of Australia" and found they grow to 6 feet in length and weigh upwards of 100lbs, and the greatest concentrations are found along the Great Barrier Reef and off the Queensland coast. The Spanish mackerel reaches sexual maturity when about 3 years old and 3 feet in length. This fish is a voracious feeder mainly on small fish, prawns and squid.

Probably what is meant is not a Spanish mackerel but rather the Common Mackerel, or better known as the Slimy Mackerel or Blue Mackerel.

According to Roughley it grows to a length of 14 inches, and **immature fish are frequently seen in estuaries**. It is a popular baitfish with few rivals but is not held in high esteem as an eating fish.

Now Geoff, you can rely on your Jimmy Crane rod to handle any slimy mackerel, but it is hardly **A Taste of Spain** by any imagination, and I certainly would not rush out to upgrade your Jimmy Crane to a game fishing outfit. What this does show is that published fishing reports often have little accuracy. Relax Geoff and pour yourself another small libation and just think 'what if Spanish Mackerel were in the Gippsland Lakes?'

Cheers (The photo is of an angler with a Spanish Mackerel. A Challenge for any Jimmy Crane rod.)

Local member has a Night Out

I received the following note from local member Tim Bull as an attachment to another letter on the 26th April.

"Hi Lynton

There are some terrific flounder about at the present time, spent Saturday night on the water and got eight beauties, in a relatively short time with the kids. I got the flounder at what is known as the "Short longway"

Which I am sure you are familiar with at the back of Flanagan island-they were all good size and good to see plenty of baitfish about and surprisingly very few European shore crabs in areas where in past years I have seen them in very large numbers."

Editor

It's great to hear some good news on the lakes, and I have attached a photo I sought from Tim showing the excellent size of the flounder. It is an interesting comment on the reduced numbers of European shore crabs in this area. They do not now seem to be the issue they were when this publication raised the matter, and comments followed indicating the lakes were being taken over by the crab. It's always great to get comments from anglers that provide added information to our understanding of what is taking place currently in the lakes. Just a reminder-. The issue of European Shore Crabs was first raised in this publication in Issue 29 October 2009 and we suggested that the matter of European shore crabs warranted investigation by Fisheries Victoria. On the 30th July 2010, Phillip Davis MLC, issued a press release suggesting that a mass of crabs a metre in depth and a kilometre in length was moving towards Lake



Wellington and also that soundings by commercial fishermen have suggested 22,000 tons of crabs were in the lakes and their numbers were rapidly increasing. Perhaps this press release needs just a little revision.

Launching Ramp Mats

Ian Fletcher provides the following observation

G'Day Lynton,

I have taken a closer look at the fibre glass mats on the Newlands Arm ramp and it appears the fibre glass matting is doing the job it is supposed to, but the problem seems to be that the mats don't go far enough, one more sheet would fix it. When retrieving a five metre boat, to hook the winch cable to the eye on the boat you walk past the end of the mats, and if you are not aware of this the concrete is super slippery.

Regards Ian Fletcher

Bream on a Fly

I had an interesting letter (3rd April) from Mansfield angler John Pincombe who fished one of the small southern NSW estuaries using the fly with quite startling results. John writes, "the estuary we fished is shallow and closed, with a lot of water less than one metre in depth. We waded the shallow in about .5 of a metre casting to sighted fish, as well as blind casting to likely spots on the drop off of 1.5metres. The method for blind casting was a long cast with rod tip near the water and fast jerky strips of the line, and when a strike is felt keep stripping the line until sure the bream is hooked. My biggest fish took 10 metres of backing line on its first run. This was very exciting fishing. I was using 7 weight forward floating line with a 12 foot leader and a 5lb tippet." John wrote that he and his mate Rick caught sixteen black and yellowfin bream on one day and probably had 40 hits. The fly used was given to John by a local angler who regularly fly fishes this estuary and has caught many hundreds of bream to 48cms. John has provided a photo of the fly, and some shots of the fish that were taken using this method. John in the past has provided us with interesting information on the development of Lake Eildon as a mixed species freshwater fishery and his vast experience includes a period providing tuition and guiding in fly fishing.



The Unnamed Fly



John Pincombe



John's mate, Rick

A Special Report

Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Committee



The following is a short statement on the role of the Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Committee - Provided by the Executive Officer Martin Richardson. (inset photo)

About the Committee

The committee's role is to advise the government (Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Ryan Smith and Minister for Rural and regional development, Peter Ryan) on the health of the Gippsland lakes. Our initial task was to prepare the draft Gippsland lakes Environmental Strategy which is to guide the coordinated management of the health of the Lakes and the allocation of the Gippsland Lakes Environment Fund. The committee represents a range of local skills and experience, and is chaired by Dr Peter Veenker.

There are two staff- our project officer Heather Adams who has a background in forestry, agricultural science and natural resource management, and I who have 25 years experience in planning and regional policy. We work for the State government, but don't represent any government department. My family has lived worked and fished on and around the lakes for five generations.

The Gippsland Lakes Environmental Strategy

The draft strategy was prepared with the input of over 200 community members, plus environmental groups, government agency representatives, tourism, fishing, business, property and community interests. About 40% of the people who completed one of our surveys listed fishing as one of their top 5 values for the Lakes. The Strategy is very supportive of maintaining and improving the recreational fishery.

I'd like to respond to the specific matters you have raised.

1. It is hard to make definitive statements about fish stocks when much needs to be done to better understand fluctuations in fish diversity and populations, sea grass health, spawning and the impact of the commercial fishery and climatic fluctuations: but we need to manage the fishery sustainably. The Lakes are never the same from year to year and we need to be careful about describing how they are changing without referencing a time frame or acknowledging short and long-term climatic influences.
2. Fish stock assessment and related research can be improved and we have identified this as a priority-the Committee has commenced discussions with DPI Fisheries to support increased research, including dialogue with recreational fishers on the process and findings. Fisheries Victoria has provided input into the Strategy.
3. The recreational fishery is a major contributor to our local economy and way of life and we have recommended an analysis of the economic value of the fishery. The committee will put its support behind increased resourcing and better understanding of the pressures on fish stocks, and practical initiatives that manage the resource for the future.
4. The draft Strategy covers a wide range of issues and is not just about fishing, but the committee's terms of reference explicitly recognise the importance of the fishery, as well as the many other economic, recreational and cultural values that the Lakes provide.
5. The Committee will support action to improve the environmental quality of the Gippsland lakes and I am pleased to advise that several projects such as the Lower Tambo Landcare Group's work' which you reported in your last edition, are being funded on the recommendation of the committee.

Where to from Here?

The committee has an advisory role. I see this as quite a powerful function for a locally based Committee, especially when there are resources attached to assist agencies such as Fisheries to carry out priority work that they identify.

As projects are identified for funding we intend to provide opportunities for "stakeholders" including recreational fishers to provide input and advice on their effectiveness and importance. I am open to suggestions on how to best gather that input

Editor

Special thanks to Martin Richardson for the concise outline of how he sees the role of the Ministerial Advisory Committee and the challenges it faces in returning the Lakes to health. I am personally pleased to see the Committee working with Fisheries Victoria and I hope a close relationship develops. I am less sure of the role of VRFish in representing anglers' interests in the Gippsland Lakes fishery, having been unable to establish any indication as to whether VRFish even responded to the 2012 draft.

The Committee-

Chair Dr Peter Veenker. (Also Chair of the EGCMA, chair of statewide CMW and DSE industry forum, Landcare member and extensive CEO and director experience of various public entities)

Arthur Allen (Professional Lakes Fisherman) **Wayne Bath** (Previously EPA Traralgon, current environmental officer for EG shire.)

Roger Bilney (Qualified and respected ecologist, lecturer and expert of bird life. Previously Fisheries Inspector.) **Rachel Bromage** (Tourism industry rep, McMillan Apartments and Boat Hire Metung)

Richard Ellis (East Gippsland Shire Mayor, board of Gippsland Ports.) **Michael Freshwater.** (East Gippsland Shire Councillor, primary producer) **Angus Hume** (Chairman of the WGCMA, environmental management qualifications) **Peter Johnstone** (Eco Tourism Operator, former DSE officer, director of Gippsland Coastal Board)

Nick Murray (Gippsland Ports Committee of Management Inc. CEO, business management) **Margaret Supplitt** (tourism industry representative, regional development, engineering background)

Desmond Sinnot (Gippsland Coastal Board director, long standing interest in Hart Morass rehabilitation)

Kate Young (Member of EGCMA, town planner with Crowther and Sadler)

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.

Good Health and Good fishing
Lynton Barr