

Lynton.G.Barr
P.O.Box 23
Swan Reach 3903
Victoria
Phone 03 5156 4674
Email- delbarr1@bigpond.com



Around the Jetties

May 2013

Issue No 68

An Anglers Newsletter

“Got to the banks of that lake. What a glorious sight! Tending to the west further than I could see and in the east to a point that shut it from my view, which I called Tambo Bluff, as that noble stream emptied itself into the lake between our camp and it. This magnificent sheet of water was quite alive with pelican, swan and several kinds of duck.”

Angus McMillan’s first view of the Gippsland Lakes.

Published in the Gippsland Times 15th January 1865



Editorial

The locally based Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Committee with due fanfare released Stage 1 of its funding, with the announcement of \$1.67 million in funding for a list of projects. Many are wondering how this list of projects was arrived at, and were submissions for funding sought from the community and bodies with responsibility for aspects of the health of the lakes, or was funding just allocated by the committee to local environmental community groups. This funding follows \$850,000 allocated in August 2012. Scant details of projects are provided in this latest

announcement, and surprisingly no details of funding are provided apart from the allocation of the \$1.67m total for stage 1. No indication is provided as to how the effective use of this funding will be assessed, or when full details of the projects will be made available to the public. Some of the bodies receiving funding have already had substantial allocations from other sources, and some projects have been covered by others over years, and no better example exists of community education than catch and release fishing, yet this is being funded again.

The big issues such, as the status of seagrass upon which the health of the lakes largely depends does not receive a mention nor does the question of mercury in fish in the Gippsland Lakes. Perhaps if this committee is really serious about the health of the Gippsland Lakes then it should be allocating funds to research projects to examine the effects of increasing salinity in the Gippsland lakes and the effects of commercial netting on fish stocks in the Gippsland Lakes. Then, together with the economic and social study of the value of recreational fishing, together with studies on seagrass and mercury in fish, there might be a scientific basis to examine what steps are needed to be taken to ensure the ongoing health of the lakes.

(Some bodies such VRFish the peak recreational fishing body had no contact with the Ministerial Committee yet was listed as a supporting agency for two of the projects. This does not mean they would not support these projects it just means they were not consulted and this is a concern.)

A Response on Flathead Prices

I note your article in the recent Newsletter about flathead prices. Flathead prices have been very high lately and the commercial fishing industry has enjoyed this. However, this is not due to the low abundance of flathead. Commonwealth (deep-water) Flathead stocks as assessed by CSIRO are high at or about the management target. This management target manages flathead stocks at levels higher (more conservatively) than the level of stock that would provide the maximum sustainable yield. This means that Flathead is increasingly easy for commercial vessels to catch. As such, this year's commercial Flathead quota was indeed easy to catch and was largely caught by about March. Thus, the supply of flathead was low in April and this pushed prices higher in fish shops. The fleet running out of quota corresponded with Easter and Easter is a time of high demand (and prices) for fish. Please don't think that the commercial fishing industry is currently highly profitable. The situation at the moment is very tough. Although fish stocks are high, fees on licences and quota are increasing (7% of turnover in the trawl fishery).

Operational cost continues to rise. Good crew are being taken by the oil and gas industry where wages are higher. Remember that any prime cut of any proteins such as Fillet steak is always in the \$30-\$40 a kilo range. We do expect fish prices to drop again after Easter as the demand decreases but also because the new quota year starts in May.

Regards, Simon Boag CEO South East Trawl Fishing Industry Association.

Editor

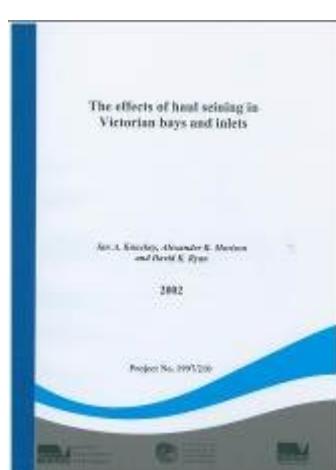
This is a most explicit summary of the reasons behind the variations in the flathead prices and I thank Simon Boag for the explanation. This of course provides an indication of the positive effects of quotas in the trawl industry and the healthy offshore fishery. It also brings into stark contrast the lack of quotas associated with the Gippsland Lakes fishery and the declining catch of black bream and dusky flathead associated with this fishery. Simon is also the editor of the SETFIA (South East Trawl Fishing Industry Association) Newsletter, which we have quoted from in the past. (By the way, my daughter bought a few flathead tails at her Lilydale fish shop last weekend and the price was \$54.95 per kilo)

Protection of Dusky Flathead in the Gippsland Lakes.

Anglers were delighted with the introduction of the new dusky flathead regulations, (1/11/2012) that saw a 30cm minimum size introduced with a maximum 55cm size limit, however this angler approval was tempered by the fact that the regulation whilst applying to recreational anglers would not apply to the commercial fishermen of the Gippsland Lakes.

Anthony Hurst Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria writing to anglers explained, "The new slot size will not apply to commercial fishing activity because it could cause wasteful discard of large dusky flathead. The current regulations for commercial fishing will remain in place."

This of course means that for commercial fishermen of the Gippsland Lakes the minimum size of dusky flathead will not increase to 30cms but remain at 27cms with no maximum size limit, to protect breeding females, and no quota to protect the stock of dusky flathead.



Now I have always been of the understanding that few dusky flathead are taken in mesh nets with the major catches being obtained by the haul seine nets. If this is the case then a powerful argument exists to extend the current regulation to commercial fishermen based on research initiated by Fisheries Victoria.

In 2002, a 110-page study was undertaken and funded by Fisheries Victoria into "The effects of haul seining in Victorian bays and inlets."

The study sought to investigate the perception that haul seines caused excessive mortality of juvenile fish. An interim finding published was that “survival experiments carried out on fish captured in haul seines has shown there is a 90% survival rate for fish discarded.” Whist this was across a range of species including King George whiting, silver trevally, sand flathead, flounder, morwong, and leatherjackets, it did not specifically include dusky flathead and this was a result of the study being centred on Port Philip Bay and Corner Inlet, neither of which support a dusky flathead population.

The conclusion of the study included this statement “slow tow speeds, short tow duration, shallow depths of operation, and sorting of the catch in the water all contribute to the ability of fish released from haul seines to survive.”

At the time of the study, the Gippsland Lakes had 18 seine netters licences and what I found interesting was the maximum length of the haul seine for the Gippsland Lakes was 732 m compared with 460m for Port Phillip Bay and 650m for Corner Inlet. The final summary states the “extension of onboard monitoring of catches to other bays and inlets particularly to the Gippsland Lakes would be useful. The Gippsland lakes fishery targets a different suite of species including black bream. Also haul seines used there are different from those used in Corner Inlet and Port Phillip Bay.”

Finally, the summary suggests, “the low level of wastage is a positive feature of the fishery that is probably an important contributor to the overall sustainability of the fishery.”

With this study, perhaps evidence exists to suggest that the recreational regulations applying to dusky flathead should also be considered for application to commercial fisher commercial fishing in the Gippsland Lakes and if this study does not satisfy Fisheries Victoria a further study should be undertaken on the survival of dusky flathead caught in haul seine nets.

*The following was part of an item on dusky flathead in the Gippsland Lakes in issue 63 November 2012-
In 2011/12, the commercial catch of dusky flathead was 22 tonnes and this tonnage has been relatively stable over the past four years with the average for this period being 20.27 tonnes per financial year over the period, however in the period 2005/6 the catch was 48.4 tonnes, which then declined to the current level. Any further decline from the current level might lead to reconsidering whether a decline in the stock is associated with the removal of breeding fish in commercial nets.*

*Current anecdotal information from anglers suggests the recreational catch of dusky flathead in the Gippsland Lakes has declined in the past season.

*Note all flathead in the Gippsland Lakes are referred to as dusky flathead. This is because of the difficulty in identification between the dusky flathead and the Eastern blue spot flathead. (For details, see issue 67.)

Report used in this item “The effects of haul seining in Victorian bays and inlets” Ian A. Knucky, Alexander K Morison and David K. Ryan (2002)

Ministerial Committee Launches Recommended 2013/14 Funding

At a launch on Wednesday 24th April at the Paynesville Cruiser Club **stage one** of the funding plan was released to an invitation only gathering. (Many who had submitted detailed submissions to the draft were not invited to this launch, which makes any suggestion of community involvement somewhat questionable)

Generally, I found the projects listed somewhat disappointing, and the funding for the twelve individual projects from the allocated \$1.67m was not indicated. The detail provided on these projects occupied less than two pages. I did obtain an outline of some of the funding for some projects, but not from the Ministerial Committee. Again open community discussion is somewhat limited if funding allocations are not known and **specific projects are not detailed**. East Gippsland Landcare, Fishcare, Greening Australia and Trust for Nature would seem to have done well with activities that will include revegetation of grasslands, protection of freshwater wetland and coastal salt marsh, and bird and fish surveys. I am informed that something in excess of \$400,000 will go to these bodies. The amount made available to the individual bodies is not specified nor are the projects specifically identified. Who is responsible for the bird and fish surveys is not specified nor in the case of fish surveys is any methodology provided. It is worth recalling that Fishcare has in the past received over \$600,000 from recreational anglers licence fees.

The East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority will receive funding for protection of the river frontage on the Mitchell, Tambo and Nicholson Rivers for stock exclusion fencing and revegetation to improve water quality. Nutrient loads reduction measures are to be undertaken in the western parts of the Gippsland Lakes catchment area by the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority and landowners. This is probably a predictable project that has long been identified as needed on our rivers, but I always thought this was a normal part of the role of a catchment authority.

I did find some difficulty in understanding how East Gippsland Landcare and Care Groups obtained something in the order of \$50,000- \$60,000 of **additional** funding to deliver school based education, holiday programs, to develop a [Gippsland Lakes bird booklet](#) and educate the community [about catch and release fishing](#). I would have thought other authorities already undertook these activities, with considerable material already being available. Are these projects of major importance or key projects that could be considered to be related to the health of the lakes?

For recreation anglers the result is mixed and funding seems minimal from my reports although it is hard to be definitive. [There is a small reference to sustainable commercial and recreational fisheries in the development of a Sustainable Lakes Management Centre of Excellence and Advance TAFE](#), however due to a total lack of any detail, I am not even sure what this means. It would seem that TAFE, the Ministerial Advisory Committee and others are to be responsible for this project, but fisheries would seem to be only a very small part of the project. The lack of detail or any real indication of what the project entails is really very hard to understand.

The most important item for recreational anglers is an investigation into the social and economic value of fishing, determining the value of recreational fishing in the area of the Gippsland Lakes is of great importance and would provide a base for further decision-making. (The National Institute of Economic and Industry Research suggested a figure of \$144m as the contribution of recreational fishing to the Gippsland area in 1997). The value today of recreational fishing in the Gippsland Lakes would probably exceed \$200m. The value of the commercial catch is around \$1m and it does not supply fish to local outlets yet its influence on recreational fishing is profound.

The project also includes [consolidating and refining the management of fisheries](#) and I have some difficulty in understanding its relevance to determining the value of recreational fishing.

In the submission I made to the Ministerial Advisory Committee based on a study of recreational angling in the Murray Darling Basin, I put forward the following. *"It should be considered essential for a study to be undertaken on the current value of recreational fishing in the Gippsland Lakes to this region, similar to the study undertaken on the Murray Darling Basin which found fishers expend around \$1.3 billion per year when fishing the Murray Darling Basin."*

What is surprising about this project is that the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority is named as a supporting agency for the project and VRFish the body representing recreational anglers in this state is also named as a supporting authority, although VRFish has said it has had no approaches from the Ministerial Advisory Committee. The DPI (Fisheries) is named as the lead agency. I am pleased that this was included in the projects listed but wonder at the role of the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority and its relevance in determining the social and economic value of fisheries in the Gippsland Lakes. It would seem to me that much more could have been achieved, with additional scientific research projects and rather than funding many bodies that already receive substantial funding.

Of additional interest to anglers would be a project to investigate the economic value of boating on the Gippsland Lakes. This project will evaluate the economic impact of boating and examine its sustainable management with the growth of boating, whilst at the same time maintaining environmental values. This is puzzling in that this project is separate from the investigation of the Social and Economic value of fishing, given that 80% of boating in the Gippsland Lakes is associated with fishing. To examine the economic value of fishing I would have thought the economic value of boating must be included.

Finally the Ministerial Committee has come up with a review of fish stock assessment methods to improve the quality of information on black bream and thereby improve the capacity to manage the fish sustainably. Again East Gippsland Catchment Management and VRFish are named as supporting agents with the Department of Primary Industry (Fisheries) being the lead agency. I understand this project will have in the vicinity of \$60-\$70,000 to examine the methods of stock assessment. **Anglers should note this is not looking at the actual fish stocks but instead is examining the methods of assessing fish stocks.**

The release of this material on the projects lacks both project and funding detail and for this reason it will be difficult for anybody to analyse the projects or outcomes that may be expected. Those bodies that depend on writing submissions for funding would seem to have done very well from stage 1 of the Ministerial Committee recommendations but then were submissions called for, or was money just allocated and this in itself is another unknown factor?

(I understand that VRFish the peak recreational angler body did not make any submission on behalf of anglers to the Ministerial Advisory Committee.)

Recreational Fishing Nets a \$1.6 million Boost

This was the heading of a media release on the 16th May and a photo in the Bairnsdale Advertiser on the 17th May with additional details of the expenditure. The largest allocation was \$300,000 over three years to East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority to improve fish habitat and build fish populations in the Mitchell, Nicholson, Tambo and Snowy Rivers by the installation of 120 wood structures in the rivers.



Picture right- Woody Debris in Tambo River

In announcing “the grant” local member Tim Bull stated, “this integrated project is aimed at improving fish habitat.” This is one of a number of initiatives being financed using [funding from the sale of Recreational Licences](#). This latest boost in funding takes the amount received from recreational fishing licences by the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority to over \$1 million in recent years.

In the last Around the Jetties, Jarrod Lyon a research scientist with the Arthur Rylah Institute indicated that almost no research had been undertaken on the effect of wooden debris in local rivers and fellow scientist, Jason Lieschke, who was working on the Nicholson River at the time, supported this view. It was stated by these research scientists that whilst wooden debris appears to be significant, until real research is undertaken all we currently have is anecdotal information. I am pleased to see additional funding for wooden debris, but ask again when are we going to have the research examining the introduction of wooden debris and determining whether it is the best method to improve fish habitat. (The East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority is also receiving a substantial allocation of funds from the Ministerial Advisory Committee see earlier in this edition.) Fishcare received a further \$113,500 over three years to conduct Fish Right workshops around Victoria, and this follows over \$600,000 previously received from anglers recreational licence fees over some years, and I understand a substantial allocation from the Ministerial Advisory Committee.

I was pleased to see some research projects listed for funding in the media release, however I have some difficulty with \$224,000 allocated to printing the Recreational fishing Guide, providing 200,000 fish length ruler stickers, 20,000 abalone and rock lobster rulers in three languages and 30,000 know your limit pocket cards in four languages. I would have regarded these expenses as normal expenses of fisheries administration and not an item to be paid for from the recreational anglers licence fees. Of course the biggest item from the money allocated from the recreational licence funds, namely the \$2 million allocated to the employment of Fisheries Officers is now rarely mentioned and it seems to be a hidden boost to the fisheries budget.

(Some anglers may now legitimately ask are there sufficient funds from recreational Licence Funds to buyback commercial licences from those commercial fishermen who requested a buyback in early 2012).

List of Large Grant items funded from the Recreational Licence Fund for 2013/14

- \$300,000 over three years to the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority to improve fish habitat and build fish populations in East Gippsland waterways;
- \$263,206 over three years to Fisheries Victoria to better understand the recreational catch of snapper in Victorian waters;
- \$150,000 over three years to improve Murray Cod fishing in Victoria;
- \$115,667 to Lake Purumbete Angling Club Inc. to assess the performance of recently stocked Chinook salmon into Lake Purumbete and Lake Bullen Merri;
- \$114,000 over three years for the Victorian Fishers for Fish Habitat Program;
- \$113,500 over three years to Fishcare Victoria Inc. to conduct 300 Fish Right workshops around Victoria;

- \$58,510 over two years to Monash University to improve the Macquarie perch fishery;
 - \$38,800 to VRFish to conduct a recreational fisher awareness campaign to reduce released snapper mortality;
 - \$45,000 to improve fish migration through the Broken River Weir;
 - \$40,000 to build an all-abilities fishing platform on the northern breakwater at St. Helens Boat Harbour at Geelong;
 - \$39,426 to the Association of Geelong & District Angling Clubs Inc. to build an all-abilities fishing platform at Aire River, Glenaire; and
 - \$22,000 to develop a recreational fishing strategy for the Docklands precinct
- * \$224 For fisheries education and communication materials/Fishing Guide, rulers, stickers and cards.



Bob McNeill's Diary Report for March and April

Bob McNeill is a dairy angler who provides reports of his fishing in Lake Tyers to the Queenscliff Research Branch of Fisheries Victoria. Bob writes, "Well I guess it had to happen, my run of continuous successful fishing days has come to an end. The last two outings returned only two size bream, one for each trip, six undersize bream between 15 and 18cms and lots of bait lost to unknown species."

Bob adds, "The number of undersize bream caught in the past ten weeks (33) with most under 20cms indicates good fishing in the years ahead."

Bob indicated he believes some flathead are still being caught but the bulk of both flathead and bream do seem to be moving up the arms. Bob makes the point the lake is very low and the water is very clear with lots of small "glassy type fish," moving in the shallows. In this period, Bob caught 30 dusky flathead and 61 bream, however with the colder weather the availability of live mullet has declined and with it the flathead catches. In this period, Bob caught 2 salmon with the best 37cms in length and 1 gurnard of 28cms. This seems to illustrate with other anecdotal information that almost no fish have entered Lake Tyers whilst it was open, and this is very different from some years when large numbers of gurnard, salmon and small snapper have entered the lake during an open period. With the numbers of small fish in the estuary, the number of large black cormorants has increased.

In his report Bob said that his son while fishing with him, "Caught a 60mm scallop on a prawn bait." After years of fishing Lake Tyers I have never heard of this happening, and wonder at the experience of other anglers.

Bob makes the observation of the increased fishing pressure on Lake Tyers and on one morning counted 21 boats in the area of the bottom lake alone. This is an observation made by many and part of this fishing pressure is due to the poor fishing being experienced in the Gippsland Lakes. Thanks to Bob, for access to his fishing diary reports, and his interesting thoughts on recreational angling in Lake Tyers.

Odd Bits and More



The Law and Recreational Anglers

This section of Around the Jetties has been introduced to bring to the notice of anglers how the actions of a small number of fellow anglers can bring our sport into disrepute.

Snapper Thieves Face Big Fines

Two men aged 42 and 39 were inspected by Fisheries Officers at the Black Rock Boat Ramp on the 7th December and were found to have a catch of six snapper greater than 40cms which is the daily allowable catch. On further inspection and additional 12 snapper were found under the floor of their boat, and on interview they admitted exceeding the catch limit and concealing their excess catch as well as providing misleading information.

In Moorabbin Court two weeks ago, the men were convicted and fined \$3000 each. The fines in this case demonstrate how the courts are now taking fish thieves very seriously and imposing large fines on anglers whose actions threaten the sustainability of a popular fishery by their actions. Both Fisheries Victoria and the

magistrate are to be congratulated in this case. (Those 12 snapper under the floorboards of the boat could be considered to be valued at \$500 each as a result of this case.)

A Damp Squid

A 37-year-old Rosebud man is facing a series of charges for exceeding the daily catch limit of squid and selling it to a local retail outlet. The arrest of this man followed a four-month investigation. The man allegedly sold 7.6kg of squid and 5.8kgs of flathead including undersize flathead to a retail outlet. A search of the man's home found a further 26.4kg of squid in a chest freezer. The operator of the commercial outlet is also facing charges in relation to the purchase of the squid and flathead. Following the man's arrest his vessel, fish, and fishing equipment were seized as well as a sum of cash.

Recreational anglers found selling fish face fines of up to \$14,000 and or six months imprisonment whilst a commercial premises caught purchasing fish from a recreational angler can face fines of up to \$28,000 and or 12 months imprisonment.

Fisheries Victoria regarded this action as "Threatening the livelihood of legitimate commercial fishers, and creating food safety risks" as well as threatening the sustainability of the fishery.

A Fishing Report Does it Again

I recently had a call from the ever alert reader Clive Blackwood drawing my attention to the **Bairnsdale Advertisers** report (Friday April 12th) of the Hobie Kayak Bream series conducted at Marlo which suggested the biggest fish caught **"a whopping 4.68 kilogram bream,"** whilst another bream caught weighed in at 4.32 kilograms. Clive thought that if these catches were authentic which he doubted, they would be close to the Australian record bream. I followed this question with some research and managed to get the Hobie Marlo report of this bream event. The field of 66 anglers fished Saturday from 7.30am and Sunday until midday.

Rick Massie weighed in the biggest bream ever taken from a Hobie Kayak in competition, a fish that weighed 1.83kgs; he also weighed in a 1.61kg fish and a 1.24kg fish for a total 4.68kgs on the first day. On the Sunday morning Ronnie Sontor took 3 bream all of 40cm size. With this result Ronnie Sonters bag for the tournament was 7.71kgs whilst Rick Massie took second place with a bag of 7.01kgs. This was a lure fishing competition with three fish to be weighed in on each day, and of course the bags were remarkable. A popular lure for Rick Massie was the Strike Pro Hummer in a natural shrimp colour.

Photo Lure and fly.com website



This was the eighth event in the Hobie series and leads up to the world championship to be held at Bemm River and Marlo later this year.

The Bairnsdale Advertiser confused the bag on day I with the biggest bream caught, however this raises the issue of what is the record for the largest bream caught by a recreational angler. I found that the biggest bream caught in a fishing competition was in the Sqidgy South bream series when an Adrian Van caught a 2.510kg bream (5.533lbs). T.C.Roughly in his book "Fish and Fisheries of Australia published in 1951 suggests the largest bream ever caught was 7lb 6oz bream caught in the Georges River in 1916. The Compleat Angler website suggests the record for black bream is 3.45kgs (7lb 10oz) and for yellow fin bream is 4.45kgs (9lb 13oz) and I would think these are probably the most accepted bream record figures, however, I have not been able to find the name of the angler nor the place where these fish were caught. Perhaps a reader may have a more information on our records for bream.

The following appeared in a Sydney paper on Friday 29th February 1952

A black bream was caught on Friday 29th January off rocks at Whyro Point, which weighed 12lb, by Mr Ray Smith sawmill manager. This fish was witnessed by Mr W.Findlay who owns a store at Milton and several others.

Mr T.C.Roughly, Superintendent of NSW Fisheries stated that if the fish was genuine it would be the biggest ever caught on the Australian coast. Mr Roughly added, "If Mr Smith wants to have it proclaimed a record an authority must examine it to identify it correctly and test the scales on which it was weighed."

A Clarification

The bream caught and described but never recognised as a record in this newspaper cutting was in our terms a yellowfin bream. The range of this species is from Townsville in the north to Lakes Entrance, and surf fishermen often catch them. Other names for this species are surf bream, silver bream and sea bream.

The black bream, as we know it is classed by Roughly as the Southern bream, but is better known as the black bream or blue nose bream. Its range extends from Shark Bay in Western Australia to Mallacoota in Victoria and Tasmania. The authoritative "Sea Fishes of Southern Australia" by Barry Hutchins and Roger Swainston have classified the species of bream as yellowfin for the northern eastern Australian bream, and black bream for the southern Australian bream, although many NSW anglers still regard the yellowfin bream as a black bream. East Gippsland is an area where both species overlap, and this is particularly so in Mallacoota. Undoubtedly if you are seeking a trophy black bream Marlo provides one of the best chances for the keen angler.

Native Fish Association Rejects Victorian Auditor Generals Report

I was pleased to see a Media Release from Native Fish Australia (Vic) supporting Fisheries Victoria work in the management of freshwater fisheries. The release states-

"Native Fish Australia (Vic) believe the recently released Victorian Auditor General's Report on the Management of Freshwater Fisheries is very narrow in its overall focus and fails to take into account many of DPI Fisheries activities and accomplishments in the management of Victoria freshwater fisheries."

The release goes on to specify some of the actions that are providing long lasting effects on the freshwater fishery of Victoria such as

*Macquarie Perch research, captive breeding and stocking efforts.

*An NFA managed Catfish breeding and stocking program.

*Habitat improvement projects that have removed barriers to fish movement and repaired habitat.

*Dye marking of 50,000 stocked fish to better understand the effect of stockings.

It is always easy to criticize, and this publication has been guilty from time to time, however a great deal is happening in freshwater fisheries around the state that will provide for the future, and this is exciting.

VRFish also put out a media release (22nd March) headed "VRFish supports the initiatives by Fisheries Victoria to improve Victoria's Freshwater Fisheries." Whilst being supportive of Fisheries Victoria, this media release makes no mention of the Auditor General's criticism of Fisheries Victoria.

Recreational Fishing Forums

The announcements of dates for the 2013 recreational fishing Forums has been made. Agriculture and Food Security Minister, Peter Walsh stated. "We want fishers across the State to have the opportunity to put forward their ideas, and these forums are also an opportunity for Fisheries Victoria to give updates on fish stocking efforts, research findings, facility upgrades and new fishing opportunities." These forums are being held with VRFish and this year Fisheries Victoria have introduced the unusual approach of inviting Rex Hunt to share his experience and expertise at the Greensborough forum, and Merv Hughes to attend the Nagambie Bendigo, Inverloch and Lakes Entrance forums to also share his expertise and experience with anglers.

The Lakes Entrance forum will take place on Wednesday 19th June at the Gippsland Lakes Fishing Club Rooms, Bullock Island. This is the only forum in East Gippsland. Given the large number of anglers (over 40) who attended last year's forum in Bairnsdale, I see little reason to have a personalities such as Rex Hunt or Merv Hughes attend these forums to share their experiences or expertise. In 2012 there was insufficient time for anglers to put forward their ideas and concerns. It might also be valuable for anglers to hear if matters raised at these forums have influenced the actions of Fisheries Victoria or in short what matters raised at forums have actually been acted upon. At the end of last years forum anglers remained to talk to Travis Dowling Director of Fisheries Management and Science and other Fisheries Victoria personnel on matters that had not been covered during the meeting, because of constraints on the time available for discussion.

Some items put forward by anglers at the 2012 forum.

- * How were anglers to be involved in discussions on the protection of spawning fish at the mouth of rivers from commercial nets?
- Bream in the Nicholson River a real concern. Decline in competitions due to lack of fish.
- Commercial netting of pilchards and salmon on local surf beaches particularly at holiday times. An exclusion zone suggested.
- Banning of netting in Jones Bay due to bird deaths in commercial nets.
- Stocking of Lake Tyers with estuary perch first suggested in 2007 Management Plan discussions. This was to be examined but no response since the forum.

- Greater presence of Fisheries Officers in Dargo and Omeo areas.
- Signage in Lake Tyers upper reaches to indicate boundary between inland and estuarine waters.

These are just a few of the items raised by anglers at the 2012 forum. Has action been taken on any of these matters raised at the 2012 Forum?

Protection of Spawning Fish at the Mouth of River

We are now approaching that period when black bream will start to move into the rivers to spawn, seeking waters of lower salinity and as we have often quoted the work of Joel Williams as being important in understanding this movement. He writes, “**During winter fish begin migrating to the upper estuary in search of lower salinity salt wedge features, and spawn from September to December.**” He further suggests, “At particular times of the year fish would move into the lakes at night (probably to forage) before returning to large wooden debris in the rivers during the day (probably for shelter). While fish were shown to move in and out of the rivers throughout the year, overall bream spent more time in the rivers from June to December, and more time in the lakes between February and March.”

Now is the period when these breeding fish are at risk should a flood event take place, and of course their movement in a daily cycle between the rivers and the lakes makes them susceptible to being taken in commercial nets set 400 metres from the mouth of rivers. In 2007 and 2011 massive kills of black bream occurred when floodwaters forced these fish from the rivers, yet we are still waiting for the Government commitment to protect spawning fish at the mouth of rivers to be introduced.

The following statement highlighting this commitment was published in Around the Jetties Issue 42 January 2011.

The Coalition would protect spawning fish by introducing controls on the practice of commercial netting near the mouths of rivers, and expand the artificial reef program to increase fish habitat.

This is the time bream are commencing to move into the rivers. The Mitchell River has been stocked with bass and has a natural estuary perch colony, both of which move to the lakes to spawn and become susceptible to nets at the river mouths. Currently should another flood occur there could be an accompanying removal of up to 100 tons of bream in commercial nets as occurred in 2007 and 2011 unless the commercial nets are removed from river mouths? This is a concern for all anglers, and one can only wonder at the continuing delay.

Source Quoted-Joel Williams “The Secret Lives of Black Bream

The First Trout Taken on the Australian Mainland

Early trout ova were transported from England to Tasmania packed in moss and surrounded with ice. Later trout ova were supplied from Tasmania to Victorian Acclimatisation Societies where despite difficulties they were hatched and a small number released.

“On the 25th June 1870 the first brown trout ever taken on the Australian mainland was angled by William Robertson from his mill dam on Riddell’s Creek near Mt Macedon (Sunbury). According to the Argus 2 July 1870 this is one of two places where fry from Tasmania were liberated some sixteen months previously. It measured 10 inches long with a girth of 5 1/2 inches at the dorsal fin. Mr Robertson commented: “With rare exceptions, I have never caught a better fish, and I have fished almost every stream from the forth to the Tweed.”

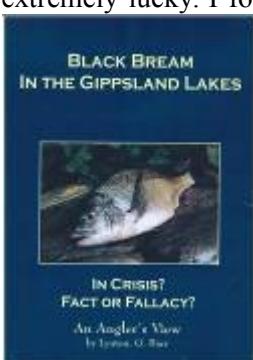
Source- Salmon at the Antipodes by John Clements 1988



This book was self-published by John Clements who was a regional Fisheries and Wildlife Officer at Ballarat and provides a wonderful history of trout in Australia. Only a small number of these books were printed so if you are interested your only chance to obtain this excellent book is from a second hand bookshop, if you are extremely lucky. I found my copy for 30 dollars in the Swifts Creek second hand bookshop and it is copy No1. It was previously in the Nagle College Library in Bairnsdale and had obviously been put out by the librarian. They lost a gem of a book.

It's a Matter of Depreciation

Talking books at Easter I was at Metung bright and early for the second hand book sale, and I have always bought some wonderful books in previous years in this



marquee set up in the park area opposite the village green. I had a bundle of books in hand when a friend came over with a book and suggested I should buy it. I looked and was surprised to see it was the book "Black bream in the Gippsland Lakes In Crisis Fact or Fiction" written by yours truly. I had no hesitation in buying this copy that was in good condition, as I only had a couple of copies still on my shelves from the 400 originally printed, and I still get the odd request for a copy. Now what was disturbing was the fact that this book we sold at cost for \$18 when printed in 2000 was marked for sale at \$2. Some years previously I saw a copy in the Swifts Creek bookshop for \$30, so obviously there had been a fair depreciation of this book over the last decade. It's still worth a read if you see a copy in a second hand bookshop and particularly if you can get it for two dollars.

The Cut on the Mitchell River

I had a telephone call from a reader indicating that whilst fishing on the Mitchell River near the "cut" he observed a commercial net well within the 400 metres allowed for netting at the mouth of rivers. Local anglers are well aware that the cut acts as a mouth to the Mitchell River, and some of the older anglers have indicated they believe the "cut" is more associated with fish movements into the Mitchell River than the actual mouth. I did raise the issue in 2011 as to whether the "cut" is regarded as part of any legislation to protect spawning fish at the mouth of rivers.



This phone call again raised this issue so I contacted Travis Dowling, Director Fisheries Management and Science, who said he would get back to me on this matter. From this response it would seem obvious that the answer to this query is not clear cut and perhaps the matter has not been previously considered by Fisheries Victoria. In any discussion on protecting spawning fish, the cut will feature every bit as important as river mouths in any discussion with anglers. The results of this query will be made available to anglers when they come to hand.

May 1 and its Significance for Anglers

On the first of May commercial fishermen were able to enter the Cunningham Arm of the Gippsland Lakes to fish. The only method that can be used in the arm is a seine net not exceeding the standard 732 metres, which is a considerable net to use in the narrow confines of the Cunningham Arm. Of course, the most interesting aspect of netting in this arm is that it can only take place one hour after sunset and must end at sunrise on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of each week ending on the 30th November. The reason for this netting taking place after dark would seem to be so that the action of netting in this arm is done away from public gaze and to avoid confrontation with recreational anglers. Of course, the commencement and conclusion of the six-month fishery in this arm is outside the holiday periods of Christmas to Easter, which again avoids confrontation with anglers in the holiday period.

I have difficulty in understanding how Tourist authorities in Lakes Entrance have accepted six months of netting in the most accessible area for the elderly tourists who come to Lakes Entrance in the winter for a holiday and the chance to wet a line. May the first is significant for anglers but it is far more significant for tourism in Lakes Entrance and those who come to this delightful spot. By the way, I have a cutting from the Weekly Times of August 2nd 2000, describing how overnight netting destroyed the fishing of a chap and his son on the Post Office jetty, so the problem was highlighted in 2000 and still remains. I wonder at the value of an activity that cannot operate during the peak holiday season and for the rest of the year can only operate at night. If it has to be hidden from the public in this manner one must question its validity.

The number of commercial fishermen has declined from 32 in the 1990's to ten today, yet there has been no reduction in the areas where netting may occur. Surely this anomaly should be examined by our local

politicians and Fisheries Victoria and action taken to limit netting at river mouths, Cunningham Arm, Bancroft Bay and the Barrier.

Letters Letters Letters

Geoff Trusler and Some Observations

Hi Lynton

Regarding your reply on the Spanish mackerel reports, I think it is more likely that if any Mackerel are being caught they would probably be Jack Mackerel (Horse Mackerel, Cowanyoung) rather than Slimy Mackerel. Jack Mackerel were quite a common catch 12 or 15 years ago, but I have never seen Slimy Mackerel caught there. Was wondering if anybody has seen any of these fish so that we may be able to get a positive identification, or are they just a figment of somebody's imagination (like the majority of the fishing reports I read from down there).

On another note, while prawning recently I have been seeing a lot of very small squid. These are only about 2 or 3 inches long, and I initially thought they were Cuttlefish. I netted a few on my last trip and they appear to be Arrow (or Aero) Squid. I did see a fairly large one of these near the barrier landing at Xmas that was attacking our baits for about 20 minutes, but considered it to be just a one off. Perhaps not. Have you ever heard much about squid inside the lakes system?

By the way, that was a great chat you had with the bait fishermen. It's blokes like them that the authorities should be talking to if they want to know about the health of the lakes system.

Cheers, Geoff.

Editor

As always, Geoff provides thoughtful observations. I would be interested if we could get a positive identification on mackerel in the Gippsland Lakes and any information on squid in the same waters.

Ross Scott Raises Concerns and makes a Prediction

Regarding Lake Wellington, it is my belief in the coming months, changes to the management of Lake Wellington will be announced. At present the fringing Ramsar listed wetlands of Lake Wellington are at risk from increased saltwater intrusion resulting from the deepening of the entrance in 2008, from 3.0 metres to the currently maintained 5.5 metres. The resultant salt wedge has advanced well up the Latrobe River and funding has been made available for detailed salinity monitoring adjacent to Dowd and Heart Morass to identify the likely impact of the increased salinity.

Three years ago in a study carried out on Lake Wellington it was reported that a submerged weir at the western end of the straits was a possible solution for holding back dense saltwater flows from Lake Victoria. I predict an announcement will be made before the next state election that modelling will be undertaken to prove the effectiveness of the salt barrier proposal. I also predict that about the same time a media release will announce that commercial fishing in Lake Wellington will be banned; thus protecting 42% of the Ramsar listed Gippsland Lakes from netting. This would have little effect on the lakes pro-fishermen as rarely if ever do they net Lake Wellington. The salinity barrier proposal will actually be to protect Dowd and the Heart morass from the detrimental impact of deepening the entrance to cater for deep draft offshore oil/gas vessels.

This action may effectively take the pressure off the Government to retire the professionals from Lakes Victoria and King and give an illusion of good management.

Ross Scott

Study quoted on Lake Wellington was undertaken by Sinclair Knight Mertz 2009

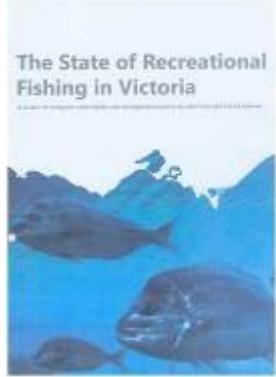
Ross Scott is an environmentalist who lives with his wife on the Newland Arm, but more importantly he is a retired Mechanical, Civil, and Municipal engineer with extensive overseas experience. He was General Manager of Lake Wellington Rivers Management Authority, and Manager of the Snowy River Rehabilitation Project amongst other managerial positions. He is known for his environmental concerns and his love of a glass of red wine of an evening.

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

A Special Report

Victorian National Parks Associations Report on Recreational Fishing Management



The State of Recreational Fishing in Victoria.

A Review of ecological sustainability and management options by John Ford and Patrick Gilmour.

In April the Victorian National Parks Assn. a leading conservation group in Victoria, which exists to protect Victoria's natural environment, and is funded by its membership commissioned a report on the state of recreational fishing in Victoria from two independent researchers. The result is a 78page report that follows hot on the heels of the report of the Auditor General into Freshwater Fisheries Management reported on in the last issue of Around the Jetties.

The following is a brief summary of the report on the State of Recreational Fishing in Victoria.

I must say this report is hampered by the lack of current statistics, and hence the need for the researchers to use 1999/2000 statistics. A case in point is the comparison of the weight and number of black bream caught by recreational anglers as compared to commercial fishermen. In 1999/2000 the recreational catch was estimated at 203 tonnes, with the commercial catch being 196 tonnes. In reality the commercial catch in 2012 was 50 tonnes, and the recreational catch of this species whilst unknown would probably be similar. The black bream is one of the key five species in this report, however the report makes no comment on the collapse of bream stocks over the last decade. This use of out of date statistics is necessary due to the lack of any more recent statistics, and the report goes into considerable detail on the need and methods to update current information.

Other species dealt with in this report are snapper, blue fin tuna, King George whiting and rock lobster. Very little information is provided on black bream and the recommendations made would probably have minimal impact on this species. I have concentrated this summary on black bream and a number of general recommendations rather than look at the other species, however undoubtedly more statistics and information was available on the recreational snapper fishery, than the other key species.

There are a number of general recommendations made that would be of interest to recreational anglers, and the extension of the angler diary program is one of these. It is acknowledged that this program is an economic method of adding to the fund of information on fish stocks, and the report suggested this program should be extended across species, with particular emphasis on research anglers targeting juvenile fish in major recreational estuaries including the Gippsland Lakes. There is a further suggestion that to encourage anglers to participate the cost of a recreational fishing license to participants should be reduced to encourage further participation.

An important recommendation to develop an understanding of the scale of the recreational catch of species is that large-scale surveys should be undertaken every three to five years to assess the fishing effort and catch of recreational anglers and this survey should cover the key recreational species.

Of interest to many anglers is the suggestion that the recreational fishing license should be extended to cover those currently excluded such as anglers over 70 years of age, or holders of a Seniors card and whilst this would be a free recreational fishing licence, the number of anglers and their catch could be determined. This proposal has merit considering the aging of the population, and it has been discussed previously that perhaps a reduced RFL fee could be introduced for this sector given the increased costs of stocking research etc.

An increase in on site surveys such as boat ramp surveys is also recommended to assist in obtaining greater knowledge of the recreational catch. I think most anglers would see the importance of getting this information as a base for future decision making.

Perhaps one of the most interesting suggestions is that regional recreation fishing groups should be part of the planning and management of recreational fisheries. This has commenced in a small way with fishing forums in this state, however in a number of areas the operation of simple reference groups involving recreational anglers to provide input into specific management plans is not regarded as worthwhile and angler input is ignored. Even at meetings that currently involve anglers, background information is seldom provided by Fisheries Victoria, so that anglers are disadvantaged in any discussion.

I think it is equally obvious that to achieve the general recommendations of this report there must be a far greater level of funding, for projects, and increased staffing levels both in the field and in research. There is a strong case for this to happen, given the Government provides \$16m over four years or \$4m per annum to fund fishing initiatives in this state, yet provides \$50m annually for the Grand Prix.

The recommendations with specific to black bream suggest spawning season closures should be considered in some of the rivers entering the Gippsland Lakes and a trial closed season for black bream between the two highway bridges on the Mitchell River should be trialled. What is disappointing is that seagrass, an influence on fish stocks, occupies one line, and the effect of commercial netting does not warrant a single comment nor its effect on spawning black bream at river mouths .

I think East Gippsland anglers fishing the Gippsland Lakes would probably be quite disappointed at this report, and the lack of any detail regarding the sustainability of black bream and management options to achieve a positive outcome for this species in the future.

A Note from the VNPA

The following describes the reason for the commissioning of this report, and provides contact information for readers on where the full report may be accessed. This publication would totally agree with the need to increase the funding and resources of Fisheries Victoria.

The VNPA considers that the gutting of Fisheries Victoria's capacity over recent years is a backward step and bad news for not only recreational fishing but the whole marine environment.

The VNPA is calling on the Victorian Government to rebuild the capacity of Fisheries Victoria by increasing support, resources and funding so that recreational fishing and the marine environment are better managed.

VNPA hopes that recreational fishers will see value in this report and its recommendations, and that it provides an opportunity for us to establish some common ground for future discussions with you about improving Victoria's marine environment and the opportunities for recreational fishing.

If you have any questions about the report, and would like further information, please contact me on simonb@vnpa.org.au or 03 9341 6508.

Yours sincerely,

*Simon Branigan
Marine & Coastal Coordinator
Victorian National Parks Association*

Authors

Patrick Gilmore

An experienced researcher and consultant, who has worked as a marine ecologist working on projects such as the deepening of Port Philip Bay. Patrick has also worked as a researcher for the Australian Conservation Foundation's Sustainable Seafood Assessment program.

John Ford

Is an independent consultant at Mezo Research with a background in marine and fisheries ecology, and he has spent the last six years at Melbourne University researching rocky reef fish in Port Phillip Bay. He has conducted almost 500 dives in areas around Melbourne and the Victorian coastline.. He has also worked with

the Sustainable seafood assessment program and presents marine and fish issues on Melbourne's Triple R radio station.