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Around the Jetties

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An Anglers Newsletter

“In 1896 the formation of the Fish Protection Society and Anglers Club in Bairnsdale urged more vigorously to have all netting in the lakes and rivers stopped so the fishermen had to rely on the harvests of the Gippsland Coast.”

The Tambo Shire Centenary History by John Adams

Editorial



With the merger of the DSE and the DPI into the DEPI (Department of Environment and Primary Industry) there have been a number of changes in the roles of Directors and managers, in Fisheries Victoria. What is of particular interest is that Victorian anglers have never been informed of these changes, except for a letter announcing that Ross McGowan was replacing Anthony Hurst as Executive Director of Fisheries. Other than a statement in that letter that he would “have a significant role in the newly merged structure, again anglers are totally unaware of the future role of Anthony Hurst. In November, Dr Murray MacDonald retired as Manager of Bays and Inlets but Fisheries Victoria made no announcement to anglers who had worked with Murray for many years. I understand his role has not been filled.

Fisheries Victoria seems to have forgotten that a need exists to communicate with anglers. After all these same anglers through their licence fees contribute around \$6 million to projects including the employment of Fisheries Officers, but even that fact is somewhat hidden. Today communication is largely through Media Releases from the Ministers and politicians, but these releases are structured to provide good publicity for the Minister or politician quoted, rather than just an information package for anglers. With a little luck these media releases will be given further publicity in newspapers and then anglers may read this news, if they are lucky. Again, anglers are not taken into the confidence of Fisheries Victoria and there is no real intention to communicate.

I come back to suggesting real communication could easily be achieved in this age with a regular Victorian Fisheries Newsletter being emailed to individuals and clubs, and perhaps a hard copy for those anglers who do not have access to the internet. In 1999, the November Issue of the Victorian Fisheries Newsletter provided a detailed list of telephone and fax numbers for the main administrators of Fisheries Victoria, with their positions in the structure. Today few anglers would be aware of who is responsible for many areas of their sport. This monthly publication was 17 pages in length and provided a tremendous amount of information that is not readily available to anglers today. I think the experience of Around the Jetties, with its over 1000 readers gives an indication of the need for a Fisheries Victoria Monthly Newsletter. Politicians could still use their media releases to keep their names before the public.

By the way, the 1999 Newsletter included a report on the first use of diaries by anglers to record fish captures and it is stated, “that in the coming months the Angler Diary Program will be used as an important tool to provide Fisheries Victoria with information on fish stocks in Lake Dartmouth and to assess snapper, King George whiting and black bream stocks in bays and inlets.” The leader of the project Simon Conran is listed with his telephone number. Forty-three anglers took part in the program. Anglers in 1999 knew far more of their sport than anglers today, and this is a sad reflection on the administration of Fisheries Victoria. “From little things big things grow”

Notice of Appointment of New Director of Fisheries Victoria

I received the following note from Luke Wilson, Deputy Secretary, Regulation and Compliance DEPI. 11th June 2013

“I am pleased to confirm Ross McGowan is the new Executive Director for Fisheries. Ross has extensive experience within the industry and more broadly. I am confident he can deliver positive outcomes for the Victorian Government and all fisheries stakeholders.

Anthony Hurst has made a valuable contribution in his time, as Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria and he will continue to have a significant role in the newly merged DEPI structure. I would like to congratulate Travis Dowling, who has been the Director of Fisheries Management and Science, on his promotion to the DEPI Regional Director Port Phillip role.

Fisheries will continue to focus on the sustainable allocation of resources for all, balancing the needs of recreational fishing, commercial fisheries, aquaculture and the environment.

Ross and his team are well positioned to continue building on the strength of our vibrant recreational and commercial fisheries sectors. Fisheries and the Victorian Government cannot do this alone and we look forward to working with you to deliver results for all Victorians.”

Regards

Editor

Whilst this publication welcomes Ross McGowan to the position of Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria and wishes him well in his new position it is fair to say there have been concerns expressed by many recreational anglers at this appointment. Chris McLennan writing in the Weekly Times (13th June 2013) stated, “Recreational angling online forums in the past week raised concerns about the elevation of Ross McGowan to the top job.” Many might suggest Ross McGowan’s background would hardly be considered ideal for the role of Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria. He was Advisor to Bill McGrath, National Party member for Lowan, then became Executive Director of the Seafood Industry of Victoria representing the interests of the commercial fishing industry, that appointment was followed by eighteen months as Regional Director of Hume DPI. I would have thought the position of Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria would have had a requirement that the successful applicant had a background in the administration of a recreational fishery and relevant qualifications for this position. I wonder why the position was not advertised Australia wide. I have no doubts the new director will represent the interests of the commercial sector with understanding. What he will need to show is that he also understands the requirements of the recreational anglers of this state with its 700,000 anglers. I wish him well in meeting this challenge and draw his attention to the urgent need to protect spawning fish at the mouth of rivers entering the Gippsland Lakes, a commitment of the current Government to recreational anglers that has been ignored. (For Further information see item Sustainable Bream)

Sustainable Black Bream in the Gippsland Lakes

I have raised this matter previously because it seems so difficult to understand given research, stock assessment meetings and commercial catch figures how a body like the Australian Conservation Foundation could get it so wrong. In 2011, with great fanfare, the black bream of the Gippsland Lakes was declared by the ACF a sustainable fishery. Of course this provided great support to the lakes commercial fishery that had denied any major decline in black bream, despite Fisheries Victoria declaring in 1996 that, “urgent action is required to protect the small remaining adult bream stocks so that sufficient reproductive capacity is maintained.”



It was at this time that regulations were implemented, “to ensure conservation of the severely depleted stocks of black bream in the Gippsland Lakes inflowing rivers.” Now every angler knows that the black bream stocks have not improved since that massive collapse.

From 2003 when the commercial catch was 26 tonnes after dropping from 137 tonnes the previous year, the commercial catch of black bream has averaged 35.4 tonnes per annum apart from the flood year 2007/8 when the commercial catch rose to 144 tonnes and then dropped back to 36 tonnes the following year. Now on this basis in 2011 the Australian Conservation Foundation declared the black bream a sustainable species after liaising with Fisheries Victoria Managers, commercial fishers and producers. One can readily imagine what the views of the Gippsland Lakes commercial fishermen were, particularly given the 2007/8 windfall bonus with the massive catch of spawning black bream at the river mouths.

The Australian Conservation Foundation did not seek recreational angler views.

The declaration of sustainability was made by a small group of scientists who took advice from a **Project Advisory Committee**. This Advisory committee included Dr Murray MacDonald, Fisheries Victoria Manager of Bays and Inlets. Dr MacDonald declared that neither he nor the department were involved in the assessment of black bream as sustainable. However, neither did he, as manager of Bays and Inlets or Fisheries Victoria, dispute the finding on black bream, despite every stock assessment since mid 1995 examining a declining black bream stock, and in 2004 declaring that the black bream stock in **the Gippsland Lakes was the lowest in 30 years with no sign of recovery**. Another member of the Project Advisory Committee was Ross McGowan, the incoming Director of Fisheries.

After the black bream of the Gippsland Lakes was given the sustainable seafood tag by the ACF in 2011, I received a letter from Chris Smyth of the ACF in response to queries I had raised on the assessment of black bream. He indicated in this letter of June 29th 2012 that-

“Seafood Industry Victoria (SIV) recently asked if it could promote the Program’s assessment of the black bream from the Gippsland lakes in a media release and the panel and the ACF were happy for the Seafood Industry of Victoria to do this. This resulted in a story in the Gippsland newspaper.”

Now the Seafood Industry of Victoria board has ten members and two of those members are the President of the Estuarine Fishermen’s Association, who was deputy chairman of the SIV, and the secretary of the estuarine Fisherman’s Association is another member, Gippsland Lakes Fishermen. It was little wonder that this body requested publicity for black bream of the Gippsland Lakes being listed as a sustainable fishery.

To many this was an unbelievable decision when the conservative Bairnsdale Advertiser on Friday, October 17th 2003, headed the front page **“Bream Fishery Crisis.”** This heading was followed with this description of a black bream stock assessment saying, **“Saturday’s session was led by Mr Sandy Morrison from MAFFRI. A range of data was presented which supported the belief that the bream fishery had collapsed.”**

How did the Australian Conservation Foundation get it so wrong, and why didn’t the Seafood Industry of Victoria with its CEO Ross McGowan have a better knowledge of the true situation of black bream in the Gippsland Lakes. This sustainable fishery term arose again on May 29th 2013 in the Lakes Post when Mr Sumner, LEFCOL General Manager spoke of **local sustainable seafood’s** and included black bream as one of those sustainable seafood’s. Readers might remember LEFCOL took black bream, luderick and yellow eye mullet filets to the Noosa Food Festival as a sample of sustainable lakes fisheries, unfortunately filets of these fish seem unavailable at any fish shop in Lakes Entrance.

Another Flood Event and no Protection for Spawning Fish

I had a report from Clive Blackwood on Thursday 13th of June, which was the start of the recent heavy rains, that a commercial boat heavily loaded with nets had been launched at the Johnsonville boat ramp and was heading towards the mouth of the river. This would probably be in expectation of a flood event occurring on local rivers. Given that by the next afternoon, we had received 120mls of rain and this was a real

possibility. If a flood event occurs this will be the third such event in seven years. Based on statistics, it would appear that from the 2007 and 2011 events the commercial mesh netters have benefited by over \$1.3m on the basis that the return was \$8.63 per kg in 2007/8 whilst in 2010/11 it was \$8.50 per kg of black bream. Now this may seem almost



unbelievable, but added to this is the fact that only a few commercial fishermen net the black bream at the mouth of rivers, not all ten.

Of course, the other effect of netting the mouth of rivers during a flood event is the loss of black bream spawning fish. The two flood events quoted would mean 1,350,000 black bream of 1kg could be taken, but in fact, that number would be far more, as most fish would be under a kilogram so it could be possible that 2 million black bream were removed.

Given the increasing salinity of the Gippsland Lakes, more fish than ever are moving to the rivers to spawn where once the spawning could take place almost anywhere, so this commercial netting at the mouth of rivers is now having a more profound effect on the fish stock than ever before.

Perhaps we should look at the amount of mesh net that can quickly be put in place in the event of a possible flood. A commercial licence holder if operating alone on the Gippsland Lakes may use 1300 metres of mesh net or if working with one or two people use up to 2,200 metres of mesh net. This means that 5 commercial fishermen working with a deckhand could set 11 kilometres of net in the Gippsland Lakes, and if set within 400 metres of the mouth of rivers it would be difficult for bream and other species to enter or leave the rivers. What may provide some relief for fish is that commercial licence holders must not in the Gippsland Lakes use any mesh or seine net from 12 noon on a Friday to one hour before sunset on the Sunday.

What is still obviously a problem is whether the cut on the Mitchell River is regarded as a river mouth. I sought clarification on this matter from Fisheries Director Travis Dowling after being informed of nets being set well within 400 metres of the cut, but this was never clarified indicating perhaps there is not a clear answer.

Of course, any discussion on the netting of spawning fish at the mouth of rivers may not have been relevant today if the state government had met its commitment to protect spawning fish at the mouth of rivers. Despite publishing this commitment in 2010 prior to the election and remembering it was highlighted in this publication, nothing has been done and the current government must accept responsibility for the removal of over 50 tonnes of spawning black bream in the 2011 flood event. If as it appears a further flood event may take place as I write this item (15/6/2013), this will add to the quantity of bream sacrificed by government inaction, and certainly commercial fishermen taking boats laden with nets to the mouth of the Tambo River expect a further financial bonanza. Recreational anglers can only despair at the continued inaction and slaughter of the iconic black bream.

The Policy announced by the Minister 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.”

By the 17th of June, we have had 10 inches of rain and commercial nets are at the river mouths. Another disaster.

The Recreational Licence Contribution to the Fisheries Budget

I have indicated in previous issues of Around the Jetties that local member, Tim Bull MLA, acknowledged he had been approached by several Gippsland Lakes commercial fishermen seeking to have the commercial fishing licence buyback placed again on the table, so that they could consider the option of accepting the offer. This was reported in Around the Jetties March 2012, and the local member asked the Minister to consider this option. Anglers would be aware that nothing further has been heard of this matter and certainly, no response from the Minister has been made available. **I believe the only reason for the silence of the Minister on this matter is that the Recreational Licence Trust Fund has insufficient funds available to fund any further buyback of commercial licences.**

Readers would remember that when commercial fishing licences were reduced from 18 to 10, the funds used to buyback licences were derived from the Recreational Licence fees contributed by anglers, so the buyback cost the Government of the day nothing. Whilst it is somewhat difficult to obtain figures, it seems the decision to fund ten fisheries officers in

2002/3 at a cost of \$580,000, was the decision that changed the value of the Recreational Trust Fund as a means of funding improvements in fishing in this state. At that time the funding of Fisheries Officers, which strangely was supported by VRFish, was approximately 10% of the total receipts from licence fees. Today the cost of employing 13 Fisheries Officers has risen to \$1.53 million in 2010/11 and, with additional costs is probably close at the moment, to \$2 million or



30% of the \$6 million in receipts from licence fees. (This figure has risen from just over \$1 million in 2009/10.)

Add to this the large administration costs to distribute funding to projects, which I calculate at \$745,000 and this includes payments to the Victorian Government Auditor and other payments to Government departments. In 2010, the cost of meetings for the eight members of the Recreational Fishing Grants Working Group who provide the recommendations to the Minister on where the funds should be spent was \$36,800 and with these expenditures, almost half the recreational licence receipts are gone.

In 2010/11 total disbursements to new projects was just over \$1million with a further \$923,000 to ongoing projects such as artificial reefs in Port Phillip Bay and the development of the Lake Eildon Murray cod fishery, and the drought recovery fish stocking.

The question would now seem to be clear. With the removal from the Recreational Trust Fund of almost \$2 million to fund Fisheries Officers, to fund a buyback of commercial licences would mean dropping some items from the mere 30% of funds allocated to fisheries projects.

If the funding of Fisheries Officers was a normal item in the Fisheries budget then sufficient funds would be available for a range of projects including having an ongoing buyback program on the table and this would tend to reduce commercial fishing pressure on the black bream of the Gippsland Lakes. I feel sure this was the intent of anglers accepting the introduction of a General Angling Licence rather than funding Fisheries Officer salaries.

In 2002/3, the cost of the employment of ten Fisheries Officers was included in the Recreational Fishing Guide with the cost of this employment also listed. Then around 2005/6 it became "10 regionally based Fisheries Officers" with no costs attached, and finally in 2009/10 it became "Field Services Operations" which again had no costs attached, and did not refer to the employment of Fisheries Officers. Was it that Fisheries Victoria was just a little embarrassed at this removal of funding from the Recreational Licence Trust Fund, provided by recreational anglers?

Finally, at no time have I seen any evidence that VRFish ever raised this issue or publicised the inequity of the process.

Just a thought I wonder does 30% of commercial licences fees go to support Fisheries Victoria providing the salary of Fisheries Officers, and if not why not.

Finally, a policy item from the **Coalition Recreational Fishing Policy** in *Around the Jetties*, Issue 42 January 2011 reads as follows-

"The Coalition would reinvest all revenue raised from Fisheries Licences back into the recreational fishing industry, along with \$4 million over 4 years for the recreational grants program."

Now is the removal of \$2 million from recreational licences to employ 13 fisheries officers a reinvestment of licence funds in the fishing industry or the provision of funds to bolster the Fisheries Victoria budget?

VRFish CEO RESIGNS



In a rather startling development, VRFish CEO Christopher Collins resigned from that position effective on the 28th June. Christopher Collins has headed VRFish for over six years and his contract was until the end of this year. However, it was mutually agreed between the Board and Christopher that the contract would not be renewed. On this basis, Christopher decided to resign immediately. It was widely known that there had been a considerable change in staff members and at this stage, VRFish will have one staff member remaining. The lack of permanent staff has meant that communication to anglers has been sporadic, and few anglers are aware of major issues where VRFish is representing their interests. (In 2013, recreational anglers have only received two monthly newsletters.)

This resignation poses considerable difficulties for VRFish, given that VRFish is listed as a supporting agency by the Gippsland Lakes Advisory Committee in a number of projects of particular interest to recreational anglers. One of these projects is determining the economic value of recreational fishing in the Gippsland Lakes. Christopher Collins has particular expertise in this area having worked on an economic assessment of the value of fishing in Victoria with Ernst and Young in 2009 and being Chair of a committee on the value of recreational fishing in the Murray Darling Basin.

Recreational angling is losing a considerable amount of knowledge and experience, and of great concern, there is no one within VRFish to replace the Executive Officer. Christopher Collins has been the recreational fishing representative on the Translocation Evaluation Panel, and a member of the Research Advisory Board.



On the 13th June, I emailed Russell Conway, VRFish chairman, (pictured left) and received a reply on the 26th of June that included the following statement. “Chris officially finishes on the 28th June 2013. I will fill the role in a voluntary (part time) basis until we find a suitable replacement. Members of the Board and members of the State Council will continue to respond to and develop submissions to issues as they arise. Simon Kiniborough will continue in his role of Administration Manager. We have engaged a book-keeper to manage our financial requirements.” Now while I applaud the energy of the VRFish

Chairman in undertaking the role of Executive Officer, I just wonder is it legal for a Board Chairman to be also an executive officer of the same body even for a short period.

Christopher will set up a consultancy business on fishing and environmental matters. Over his years with VRFish he has built up a substantial network in this area. Christopher says his task, as executive officer of VRFish has been a wonderful experience. It will now be a task for the VRFish board to see staffing of the VRFish secretariat provides recreational angler support, and above all, to appoint an experienced executive officer who can provide leadership in a challenging period that recreational angling may face. What I find difficult to understand is why the board of VRFish knowing Christopher Collins contract was to end in December 2013, never had a succession plan in place with an assistant working with Christopher to gain an understanding of the challenging position. Despite over \$390,000 of Recreational Licence fees being allocated to VRFish to run its secretariat, it would seem anglers face a period where representation of their interests will be difficult if not impossible.

It was rather strange that the VRFish Chairman speaking at the Lakes Entrance recreational anglers Forum, made no reference to the retirement of Christopher Collins after 15 years active involvement in recreational angling administration with nine years as a board member and over six years as executive officer of VRFish.

Estuary Perch in Lake Tyers

I was reading in the March/April issue of the Freshwater Fishing magazine that “Lake Straun has recently been stocked with estuary perch, and so too has (apparently) Lake Corangamite by Fisheries. Lake Bolac’s estuary perch have been in the lake for over a year and are currently approaching 12cm in length and thriving.” Lake Straun appears to be a very small lake near Lake Corangamite in the Western District.

Now I find this surprising given that in 2007, when the Management Plan for Lake Tyers was being introduced, submissions were called for, I, and several others put forward submissions for a stocking of estuary perch in Lake Tyers, given that this species was formerly in Lake Tyers. This fact was supported by information put forward by this publication indicating that in the eighties, in one year 1.5 tonnes of estuary perch were netted near Blackfellows Arm. **The stocking of Lake Tyers with estuary perch was not supported in the Management Plan, which is not surprising as the Steering Committee providing advice to Fisheries, had almost no one with local knowledge of Lake Tyers, and amazingly, the Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club was not represented on the Steering Committee.**



The photo above shows Robert Harvey with an estuary perch caught some years ago in Lake Tyers. This is the only photo we have of a Lake Tyers estuary perch.

Several years ago John Harrison of the Lake Tyers Beach Angling club, put a detailed submission to Fisheries Victoria for a release of estuary perch into Lake Tyers. He used the argument that the release would help to return a population that had previously existed in the lake prior to the commercial netting of the 1.5 tonnes,

which seemed to have decimated the population of this species. This could also mean the establishment of a species that would naturally breed in the estuary and be self-sustaining. This is not the case with the stocking of Western District lakes, where no breeding will occur and so this becomes a fishery that will need regular stocking to be maintained. I regard this approach by Fisheries of stocking Western District lakes, but not acting to restore an estuary that formerly had a self-sustaining estuary perch population, as most surprising. John Harrison is again submitting to fisheries a detailed submission on behalf of the Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club, requesting a stocking of estuary perch in Lake Tyers. Interestingly John recently had a confirmed report of two anglers who had caught a couple of estuary perch near the Trident, and John is asking for reports from any anglers who might have caught an estuary perch in Lake Tyers in recent times. This information will be used to support the submission again being presented to Fisheries.

(Any reader's reports can be directed to me through the email address of this newsletter and I will pass these onto John. Photos with details on time and place of catch also welcome provided they were caught in Lake Tyers)

I have some difficulty in believing Lake Straun would be stocked with Estuary perch.

Late News

Since writing the above, I have received news that Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club has received a Recreational Fishing Licence Grant of \$5,000 to investigate the potential for the stocking of estuary perch in Lake Tyers. The actual application stated-

"Members of the Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club and local members of the fishing community had a keen interest in the condition of estuary perch stocks in Lake Tyers. The Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club (LTBAC) is concerned that previously strong populations of estuary perch have now been reduced to very small numbers and there has been no rebound in population since the cancellation of commercial fishing licences in 2003."

The application further states, *"we also understand that techniques have been developed in NSW to successfully produce estuary perch juveniles and that successful releases have occurred in Western Victoria. We now believe it is time to investigate the stocking of estuary perch as a response to dwindling numbers and apparent poor recruitment in Lake Tyers"*

The project will involve checking past commercial fishing records prior to 2003 when commercial anglers were bought out, as well as angling club records to establish catch levels of estuary perch. Also, the LTBAC will conduct a number of workshops with interested anglers to collect further community knowledge of estuary perch in Lake Tyers. Finally, information held by Fisheries Victoria will be examined to establish the potential for conservation stocking of estuary perch. The application followed discussion between John Harrison secretary LTBAC, and Anthony Forster, Acting Director Fisheries Management and Research, Fisheries Victoria. Mr Foster suggested this application and encouraged this detailed investigation.

Editor

This publication congratulates John Harrison and the LTBAC for their initiative in putting forward a proposal for this investigation that could provide a basis for the stocking of estuary perch in Lake Tyers. We have in previous issues brought to the attention of recreational anglers of the fact that in the early 1980's Frank Milito, local charter operator vividly recalls his father, a commercial fisherman netting near Blackfellows Arm and capturing 1.5 tons of estuary perch in his nets. Estuary perch were in Lake Tyers in substantial numbers in the past, and the actions of the LTBAC gives hope that they may return with the support of a stocking program to this wonderful estuary in the future. By the way, this project together with the improved launching facilities at Lake Tyers another project of the LTBAC, demonstrates just what can be achieved by anglers working together.

Anglers Forum



On a cold bleak night (19th June) over 50 anglers crowded into the Gippsland Lakes Angling Club Clubrooms for a forum on fishing issues with an opportunity for anglers to raise matters of concern. The Forum section of the night was chaired by retiring Fisheries Director Travis Dowling, (photo left) and this will be one of the last actions by this popular figure. Merv Hughes former test cricketer spoke for 25 minutes and Russell Conway gave a short outline of the role of VRFish. For anglers the most important part of the evening was the discussion of questions raised. The following provides the briefest summary of the major issues raised in the 50 minutes of Forum discussion.



As was expected the first item raised, was commercial netting of spawning fish at the mouth of rivers and several anglers questioned the continuation of this practice. Travis Dowling indicated Fisheries Victoria were working on the options to achieve this protection, but he also indicated any change of regulations might not completely achieve the wishes of recreational anglers.

Kevin Barling spoke of his concern for the Gippsland Lakes and the decline in areas of sandworm and shell. He also questioned the impact of water from the Morwell mine was doing and its impact on the lakes environment. He raised the option of a second opening to get rid of material that was currently entering the Gippsland Lakes. Kevin also made a plea for bait fishermen to be treated separately from commercial netters to ensure the survival of the bait industry, and he made the point that the bait fishing industry has far more in common with recreational anglers rather than commercial netters.

An issue of most concern raised by a number of anglers was the closure of most of the town jetties of Lakes Entrance to recreational anglers by Ports and Harbours on the grounds of health and safety factors. This seemed to have taken place without prior consultation with recreational anglers and involved jetties such as the Bank Jetty and Scallop Jetty. Anglers suggested steps should be taken to develop fishing platforms in Lake Entrance to cater just for anglers. Whilst Travis Dowling indicated he would talk to Ports and Harbours the development of fishing platforms would be a wonderful project for the local Chamber of Commerce to initiate, and for the East Gippsland Shire to support. Such a development could have a major influence on catering for tourists, and in particular the aged and young anglers. It might also give some impetus for the Cunninghame Arm to be closed to seine netting which was raised in association with jetty closures. It is obvious that Lakes Entrance sees little value in recreational fishing.

One of the most interesting items was raised by Don Cunningham long time Bemm River resident and fishing spokesperson for that area who travelled to the Forum from Bemm River. Don explained there had been a massive explosion in dusky flathead numbers in the Bemm River estuary, and that in the past these waters had not been known for a large dusky flathead population. Don declared that he estimated that 20,000 dusky flathead had been taken over the holiday period. He also mentioned that some had not respected current regulations. (See Legal Section) Don also raised the problem of the entrance to the Bemm River silting up and queried whether this was happening in other estuaries.

John Harrison raised the issue of Fisheries Victoria taking actions alone often using recreational licence funds with little reference to anglers in particular areas, and this particularly applies where active angling clubs of those areas could be involved in decisions being made. John noted the expenditure of \$225,000 on the release of Eastern King prawns in Lake Tyers had not been widely discussed, and the same could be said for the introduction of an artificial reef in Lake Tyers. He appealed for a greater level of consultation and the development of a priority listing of projects in consultation with recreational anglers.

The annual issue of cormorant's numbers was raised again, however little if anything can be done to protect fish from cormorants, which are a protected species.

Mathew Richardson Executive Officer of the Ministerial Advisory Committee spoke briefly of the operations of this committee noting it was working with Fisheries Victoria and sought input from recreational anglers.

This was a good night where anglers had an opportunity to get together to discuss a wide range of issues. I must say I was very surprised that the official Gippsland Lakes Black Bream Stock Assessment Report, (2012) released a few days previous to the Forum was not discussed, given that Simon Conran one of the reports authors and a fisheries scientist with vast black bream experience present at this forum. I believe an outline of that report should have been given at this forum, given that the Forum took place on the edge of the Gippsland Lakes amongst anglers most of whom would spend time fishing for this iconic species. With great respect I would suggest that the black bream assessment report would have had much more importance for this audience than the general yarn of a paid public speaker, and would have been a better use of Fisheries Funds and time. I doubt we need a media person to get anglers out on a cold evening to discuss matters that had little relevance with fishing issues. (No newspaper reporting of this forum-)

ODD Bits and More

Lake Tyers Breakout a Possibility and then Reality

As I write this item, I have just returned from Lake Tyers (17/6/2013) and the estuary has risen substantially from the lowest level I have seen in the last 15 years to within what would appear to be less than 2 feet to break out. Yesterday when I went to the estuary the wild seas were breaking over the sandbar separating Lake Tyers from the sea, and the jetty beside the boat ramp was around 3 feet above the water level. This morning the jetty is just under water, which gives an indication of the rapid rise of this estuary, but then at our home in Swan Reach we have had 244mls of rain in the last five days including 80mls last night. I would expect there is every chance that the lake will break out in the next five days. This raises the interesting prospect that has concerned recreational anglers ever since the stocking of Eastern King prawns was initiated by Fisheries Victoria, namely will the 300,000 stocked prawn larvae leave the estuary upon its opening to the sea? This would have been an issue that would have been explored if the Reference Group appointed by the Executive Director had met on more than its inaugural meeting in August 2010.

On the 17th June I had this note from John Harrison whose home overlooks the entrance.

“Water starting to intrude into the car park at the Tavern. The water level is still approximately 25cms below the level at which it breaks out, Could break out tonight. I bet all those little prawns are just waiting to get out.”

On the 18th June I received the following note from John.

“Lake opened naturally 7.25am today. The lake had been closed for 231 days.”

As can be seen from the accompanying photos the break out looks to be substantial, and Lakes bait fisherman, Kevin Barling, estimated the opening to be close to 100 metres wide, and almost 2 metres deep with an inflowing tide, so anglers will hope that a variety of species enter the lake in the next months. At the Anglers Forum on the June 19th, research angler John Harrison and Diary angler Bob McNeill indicated they were going to be on the water before daylight the next morning fishing, and you really have to be dedicated on these mornings to be out at that time.



Lake Tyers is open to the sea again.

Gippsland Lakes Black Bream Stock Assessment 2012 Report

On Monday the 17th June I received the official 58-page report of the 2012 Black Bream Stock Assessment, and I will provide a brief summary of items arising in this report not covered in my report of this meeting last September. Just in my first look at the official report I was somewhat stunned by the following statement. *“Bream stocks in the Gippsland lakes are protected from overfishing, primarily through Legal Minimum Length regulations. This protection is being compromised by anglers retaining undersize fish (estimated at 10% of the recreational harvest)”*

I was informed by Simon Conran one of the authors of this report that this finding was based on shore and boat based interviews with recreational anglers between 2005-2011. For recreational anglers who are aware of the black bream situation this is most concerning. This statement in the report was the basis for some discussion I had with Fisheries Officers at the forum, who were very surprised at the level of non-compliance reflected in these figures. What was also somewhat mystifying was that these figures were not disclosed at the Stock Assessment attended by recreational anglers in September 2012.



Craig Ingram on Landline

It was pleasing to see former local and independent Member of Parliament on the ABC Landline program on Sunday 9th June, when he spoke for recreational anglers opposed to barramundi aquaculture project in Darwin Harbour. The case he put was that it could cause pollution, and may have detrimental effects on the recreational fishery of that area. Craig is now the Executive Officer of recreational fishing groups across the Northern Territory, which is a massive task in probably the best fishing areas in Australia. Craig was a former Chairman of Native Fish, an abalone diver and an expert bass fisherman. In this new area he should be having a wonderful personal experience and I imagine he would forcefully represent the interests of recreational anglers.

Growth Rates of Dusky Flathead

I was reading some of my old notes the other day as I attempted to tidy my studio and work area when I came across this note.

“Readers may be interested in some information relating to a tagged dusky flathead recently recaptured in Lake Tyers. Tagged by the late Peter Spehr on the 17th/12/2004 with a measured length of 660mms. This fish was recaptured by research angler John Harrison on 9/1/2009 with a measured length of 820cms and a weight of 3.20kgs (7.1lb). The fish as expected was female. The otoliths were removed and the fish was found to be 10 years old. In four years the fish had grown 160mm giving an average growth rate of 40mm per year.”



Once again, this interesting item shows the value of VICTAG and the tagging of fish, and makes me wonder why Fisheries Victoria does not support such a program. It could involve recreational anglers and cost little but it seems to be out of favour with fisheries management.

Of particular interest given the end of another flathead season is the lack of small flathead caught by anglers. By small flathead I mean fish under 30cms, and if one looks at Diary Angler Bob McNeill’s catch figures for the past season, what stands out is the lack of these small fish in those figures. Generally not many fish over 55cms have been caught but hardly any under 30cms. This has been my experience and also the experience of other regular Lake Tyers anglers with whom I have discussed this matter

That excellent NSW dusky flathead study by Grey and Barnes states “Dusky flathead grow relatively quickly with fish estimated to reach a mean length of approximately 30cms total length in one year and 42 and 59cms total length after 5 years for males and females respectively.” This study further noted, “We estimate that most dusky flathead are approximately 2 years old when they reach the current minimum legal length of 36cms.”(This is the NSW minimum legal length)

If these figures were applied to Lake Tyers it would seem to indicate a decrease in flathead spawning in 2011/12, which may be reflected in catches in the next two years. Most dusky flathead anglers do not keep this species under 38cms so it will be interesting to see if the current normal catch of 40-48cm dusky flathead

is maintained in Lake Tyers. I would have liked to look at this in the Gippsland Lakes to see if the same decline in small fish has occurred however I have not been able to get an indication of catch rates and sizes as so few dusky flathead seem to be caught. In recent times I have had far more reports of dusky flathead in the Tambo and Mitchell rivers than in the lakes. The fish caught in the rivers seem to be 40-46cms again with no small fish, but this is a very small sample.

Source- *Reproduction and Growth of Dusky Flathead* –Charles A. Gray and Lachlan M, Barnes (2008)

The Law and Recreational Anglers



Most local anglers would be aware of the action of three Sale anglers reported on ABC Gippsland News and in local papers and reported in the June issue of *Around the Jetties*. These three anglers appeared in the Orbost Magistrates court after being caught with 59 fish of which 57 were dusky flathead at Bemm River in December and two of those apprehended were also fishing without a licence. The two without a licence were ordered to donate \$500 and the other man \$200 to East Gippsland Fishcare. Their fishing gear valued at \$2500 was forfeited and they also had to meet legal costs.

The real tragedy is that these poachers have brought recreational angling into disrepute, and disregarded the years of work of anglers and Fisheries Victoria in arriving at a formula to protect dusky flathead for the benefit of all anglers and this species for future generations. It is to be hoped that Fisheries Officers will target this area, in particular over the Christmas holiday period, given Don Cunningham's estimation at the recent angler forum that 20,000 dusky flathead were caught over the holiday period at Bemm River. I would draw the attention of readers to Issue 68 where the Law and Recreational Anglers section reported that two men had 12 snapper over the bag limit when inspected by Fisheries Officers. They were each convicted, fined \$3,000 each and had fishing gear forfeited. It would seem that the anglers at Bemm River were very lucky with the order to make a small donation to Fishcare. The anglers at Black Rock with their fine paid \$500 for each fish over the bag limit, whilst the anglers at Bemm River apart from forfeited fishing gear were out of pocket \$27 for each fish over the bag limit.

This is just a little hard to understand.

Editor

Readers would be aware that in the past anglers convicted of offences had their names, the offence and the fine published by Fisheries Victoria in the *RECFISH NEWSLETTER*, a department publication for anglers published monthly. I believe this would be a deterrent today, and may also lead to some logic in the application of fines. I noticed that in the nineties in South Australia the names of offenders were published in *Southern Fisheries* a magazine of the South Australian Fisheries department. In the autumn issue of 1996 the front cover featured a full-page photo of the first person in South Australia sentenced to 12 months jail for abalone offences. I think this policy was called "Name and Shame" and perhaps it is time for repeat offenders to have their names published in Victoria.

Retirement of Dr Murray MacDonald



I have just heard that Dr Murray MacDonald, Manager of Bays and Inlets retired last November from Fisheries Victoria after more than 30 years involvement with Victorian fishing. Dr MacDonald will be remembered by anglers for his work at black bream stock assessment over the last 15 years. He was a fisheries scientist whose work and reports made a considerable contribution to the understanding of black bream, and other species in our estuaries. In 1994 Dr MacDonald wrote the Fisheries assessment report on fin fisheries in Lake Tyers and in the same year wrote a similar paper on fin fish and black beam in the Gippsland Lakes. In recent times he has undertaken work with colleagues on blue fin tuna.

His position as Manager of Bays and Inlets has not been filled and currently his role is shared by the Fisheries Management and Research Group of Fisheries Victoria. The retirement of Dr MacDonald is a loss to the research capabilities of Fisheries Victoria, and it is surprising that in almost nine months since his retirement, no appointment to the position of Manager of Bays and Inlets has been made. Anglers would wish Murray well in his retirement, and when I met him at the recent Recreational Anglers Forum he had just returned from Galway in Ireland where he was working as a fisheries consultant.

Fisheries Research

I was talking to a Fisheries Victoria scientist some weeks ago and he indicated that the figure predicted by scientist Joel Williams, (Around the Jetties Issue 63 Nov.2012) that the number of fisheries researchers would be reduced from thirty to just fourteen, at Fisheries Queenscliff is proving correct. It was suggested that this number of researchers would not be able to monitor and collect data on all marine and freshwater fisheries, as it would just be logistically impossible. This statement regarding a reduction in fisheries scientists would seem to be supported by the current non-replacement of Dr Murray MacDonald a fisheries scientist with perhaps the greatest experience with black bream. I would think serious anglers would be most concerned at these cutbacks in a vital area given it is a time when fish stocks are under ever increasing pressure.

Letters Letters Letters

Hooks in the Mouth of Bream

I received the following letter from reader Ian Wilson on the 11th June.

Lynton

“Thank you for your informative and interesting newsletter. I have been visiting the Gippsland lakes to fish for over 35 years and appreciate your love of the area. Keep up the good work.

I have a quick question regarding any research you have done regarding leaving hooks in the mouth of bream. When bait fishing quite often we need to cut the line as the fish has completely swallowed the hook and understanding they should survive. We love fishing and it is all catch and release. We prefer to release the fish with a swallowed hook rather than cause damage attempting to remove it. Do you know if these fish survive?

Thanks

Ian Wilson.”

Editor

I responded to Ian and publish this response as Ian has raised an interesting issue

Glad your enjoying Around the Jetties. After each issue the number of readers seems to grow.

With regard to your question, a substantial study was undertaken by Simon Conran, Daniel Grixti, and Sandy Morison, into the “Assessment of mortality in the release of undersize black bream and snapper. (2004) These chaps were fisheries scientists in Fisheries Victoria, and you could Google this up and get a very detailed report.

Basically the report suggests that shallow hooked snapper and black bream have a very low mortality 1-2% on release, however if the fish is deep hooked the mortality increases to 22-23%. Associated with this there study found that deep hooking increases with any decrease in hook size. On a practical note when I fish for bream with prawn I use a size 1 Aberdeen Mustad hook, which is a light bronzed hook and honestly I cannot remember when the last bream I caught was deep hooked. The study also found that fishing with a tight line reduces the number of fish deep hooked and you tend to catch fewer small fish.

Certainly any deep hooked fish should have the line cut close to the mouth, and this increases the survival rate, against trying to remove the hook. I use a piece of towel which I wet to handle any fish that is to be released, and even with the line cut this deep hooked fish should have a 70%+ survival rate. This rate is reduced if the fish is bleeding. I know that most anglers agree that hard baits such as crab attract larger fish and seldom does a fish become deep hooked on these baits, and equally soft baits such as worm, which require smaller hooks, attract smaller fish and have a resultant higher level of deep hooking. A recent finding has been that knotted landing nets do considerable harm to fish, and I changed a few years ago to a collapsible rubber net, which works well and is easy to store.

Great to hear from you and I hope this short note helps. Of course one of the real advantages of the massive change from bait to lures is that lures hardly ever result in deep hooking, but for older anglers like myself there is something restful in watching a bait rod and waiting for that massive bream bite.

Those Prawns in Lake Tyers

I received this letter from Chris Setio from the University of NSW. Chris, who is a fisheries scientist. has been working on the project of stocking prawns in Lake Tyers. (photo right)



Hello Lynton,

Apologies for not getting back to you sooner, but I had a few things to catch up with once I returned to Sydney after making a quick trip down to Lake Tyers last week. I made the trip down to Lake Tyers to see if there was any prawns in a few key locations that we stocked but had no luck. We can only keep our fingers crossed that the prawns have been bunkered down somewhere in the lake and weren't flushed out.

I'll be making a scheduled check of the lake again in August and hopefully we can see if there are any about then.

Cheers Chris Setio

Editor

I thank Chris for his note, and will look forward to his report in August as to whether any prawns remain in Lake Tyers. I guess the first question asked by recreational anglers when Fisheries Victoria announced the expenditure of \$225,000 to stock Lake Tyers with Eastern king prawns was, what would happen if the lake opens. Of course it is expected that almost 1 million prawns will be released in Lake Tyers just before Christmas, however I would imagine this would depend on the state of the estuary opening. John Harrison who met with Chris when he hurriedly returned to Lake Tyers on the day of its opening indicated that Chris took a number of samples back to Sydney unsure if they were prawn or shrimp, however, following examination in the laboratory he advised that they were shrimp. John added that there is real concern that the prawns may have been taken out of the lake by the flood event, however as the small prawns exist in the same habitat as shrimp, there is still some hope that some may have survived..

Boating Fines Rise.

Recreational anglers should be aware that increased fines and some new fines will apply from the 1st of July. The introduction of these increased fines has been done with little publicity, and anglers should be aware that many of these fines could apply to them. Standard fines seem to have arisen by 46% but some fines have increased by up to 700%. A couple of examples of these changes

- 1 Fail to wear a floatation device in a vessel under 4.8 metres that is under way -\$289 up from \$154
2. Permit a vessel to be moored to navigation marker, beacon or buoy pole or post-\$289 up from \$147
3. Act a master of a registered vessel without identification mark displayed \$289 (New fine)
4. The fine for causing or allowing an unregistered vessel to be operated -\$722 up from \$147 (An increase of 379%)

A more detailed analysis of these increased fines will be in next month's issue

Ministerial Advisory Committee

Martin Richardson Executive Officer of the Ministerial Advisory Committee has sent me a list of projects approved, for this year with the funds allocated to these projects. The projects lack any specific detail or how the funds will be allocated between groups, however it provides an initial indication of the expenditure. This publication will provide a copy to any reader interested in the broad proposal. Just give us a call.

Special Thanks

A very special personal thank you to the Richmond Angling Club, who sent \$200 to help defray expenses associated with the publication of Around the Jetties. This club has been associated with this area over many years, and Around the Jetties is emailed by the secretary to all members.

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***