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Around the Jetties

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Issue No 73

An Anglers Newsletter

“That he died on the 13th February 1601, being aged 95 years and that his age had neither impaired his hearing, nor dimmed his eyes, nor weakened his memory. Tis said that angling and temperance were great causes of these blessings, and I wish the like to all that imitate him, and love the memory of a good man.”

Izaak Walton writing in the Compleat Angler 1655 describing Dr Nowel Dean of St Pauls Cathedral London

Editorial

In this issue we announce that Around the Jetties is now online and readers will be able to gain access to items in past issues commencing with Issue 69. This has been accomplished by the Lake Tyers website providing this access on www.laketyersbeach.net.au Readers will continue to get personal emailed copies, whilst hard copies will be available to readers who do not have access to computers so little will change other than to make Around the Jetties available to a wider readership. Our thanks to Rob Ward for providing his expertise to ensure that past copies of Around the Jetties will be available to readers on his Lake Tyers website. Over the years we have recommended the Recreational fishing and trailer Boat Owners Advocacy and Support Group publication to readers of Around the Jetties. It has been announced that this occasional publication will now be available on its website at www.recfisho.com.au.

Both these sites will bring information to recreational anglers and provide viewpoints on issue for recreational anglers to consider. I hope this helps to cover areas of the communication vacuum particularly when policies such as matters associated with Recreational Fishing Licences are being discussed, by bodies such as the State-wide Roundtable and VRFish, both of which should have direct communication to the recreational anglers of the state but unfortunately this is not happening.

What will Lake Tyers Offer this Time

Each time Lake Tyers opens to the sea regular recreational anglers wait to find what varieties of fish have entered the lake, and what changes this will bring to the fishery which is normally based on the estuarine species of dusky flathead and black bream. There is always the chance of an oddity occurring as was the case on the 8th February when fishing from my boat close to the cliffs of the Mission I hooked and landed a 68cm barracouta, which took a live mullet. The lake had closed on the 16th January of that year so it would seem this fish was a new entrant to the lake. I haven't heard of any other barracouta being caught in Tyers but undoubtedly someone will have a story of a rare fish.

On the 22nd November 2002, Graeme Merryful was fishing about 40 yards from me in his boat opposite Mill Point when he hooked into what he thought was the best dusky flathead ever caught in Lake Tyers. Some fifteen minutes later he brought to the side of his boat a large stingray, and duly cut the line with the odd expression of disappointment. The lake had closed on the 16th January in that year so the stingray had spent almost a year cruising Lake Tyers.

Another relatively rare fish is the Tarwhine and I managed to catch several 35cm fish of this species. It is an interesting fish in that Lakes Entrance is the southern boundary of this species whilst the northern boundary is Fraser Island off Queensland. I asked in Around the Jetties March 2008 had anyone caught this species and received this wonderful photograph from Peter McDiarmid of a chap on his charter who caught a beautiful example of this species in January 2008. (See attached photo). This fish has a body similar to the bream but has a blunt nose with fins other than the dorsal fin bright yellow. The late Peter Spehrs caught several of these fish in Lake Tyers.



A normal recruit to Lake Tyers at opening are small snapper however in the last opening there seemed no indication that snapper had entered Lake Tyers in any numbers. On the 22nd May 2007 I caught a 50cm snapper in the Nowa Nowa Arm and this fish was over 4lbs whilst in 2005 in four visits to the bank just below the Tavern at Lake Tyers I caught 16 snapper, all between 2-3lbs. The weather was rough and water was coming into the lake over the sandbar, and I believe the fish had moved close to where a break out might occur. We will wait hoping that small snapper are entering the lake whilst it is currently open.



One of the great mysteries is what happens to tailor when the lakes open, and could be that they leave the lake, and it also seems that with some openings a large recruitment of tailor takes place, and these fish at times of the year school and provide wonderful sport. Within the lake is the chance that some large tailor may have been recruited from an opening, and I would think this probably accounts for the 10lb tailor I caught in the Nowa Nowa Arm in 2008.

Lake Tyers seems to have historically offered that opportunity to catch a very large fish and this includes dusky flathead and black bream. According to the book [“Sea Anglers Fishes of Australia”](#) by Arthur. W.Parrott published in 1959 “the largest known species of black bream was obtained at Lake Tyers in 1918 weighing 7lbs61/2 ozs. This fine specimen may be seen mounted in the Melbourne office of the Victorian Fisheries and game Department.” I wonder where that fish is today.

The fish in the photo on the right, was shown on the Lake Tyers Beach website, and it is a most rare catch in Lake Tyers, and there is an element of difficulty in identifying this species. Some anglers have identified it as being an estuary cod, however they are only known to occur as far south as the Sydney rocks and “Sea Fishes of Australia’ suggests the estuary rock cod “has not been found in southern Australia.” My guess is that it may be a Wirrah cod as they are known to extend into this area, and the colour seems right.



The question remains as to what Lake Tyers will offer to anglers when it eventually closes to the sea. We know dusky flathead black bream and luderick will provide the staple diet for anglers with tailor garfish and salmon, however will leather jackets, gurnard snapper, trevally and other species again become part of what Lake Tyers offers in the next year or so. Only time will tell, but that is part of the excitement when fishing this pristine estuary.

Annual Funding for Fishcare

On the 10th September the Minister for Agriculture Food Security and Minister for Water, Peter Walsh announced by Media release that Fishcare funding has “been secured thanks to ongoing funding allocated by the Victorian Coalition Government.” The media release then went on to say that \$200,000 per year would be provided to the group from the sale of recreational fishing licences. In other words the largesse of the Government is costing it nothing as it is using the funds provided by anglers through their licence fees.

There are a number of concerns at this allocation. When Fishcare was formed in 1995 in Gippsland, based on a Western Australian model, it was fully funded by Fisheries Victoria from 1995 until 2004 as part of the Fisheries community education program. Since 2004 Fishcare has applied for funding regularly and been funded from the Recreational Fishing Licence Trust Fund on the recommendation of the Fisheries Revenue Allocation Committee to the Minister. In the period 2008/9-2011/12 Fishcare received just over \$400,000 from this source with a further \$200,000 approved for 2012/13.

This announcement now means that Fishcare is a further permanent charge on the receipts from recreational licences, similar to the charge to employ 10 Fisheries Officers, and many other areas. This announcement is in reality removing funding from licence fee receipts to bolster funding of Fisheries Victoria and its budget. In the early years of the recreational “all waters” licence introduced in 1999, according to a paper by Ross Winstanley presented to the Recreational Fishing Roundtable in June 2013 (see Issue 72) more than 60% of licence fees were spent on projects, however today less than 37% of funding received from fisheries licences is allocated to projects, and even this allocation and the projects being funded are subject to questioning by anglers.

The following statement appeared on the document introducing the all-waters licence in July 1999 and seeking the support of anglers. *“The all waters licence is linked to the State Government buy-back of commercial fishing licences from Victorian bays and inlets.”* Many anglers particularly those in East Gippsland wonder whether sufficient funds remain to buy back commercial licences, after ongoing permanent commitments of recreational licence fees to items formerly funded by Government. We know that some commercial fishermen in the Gippsland Lakes have requested that the buy-back again be put on the table, and we know this request was taken to the Minister more than eighteen months ago, however he has never responded to this request, and many believe that insufficient funding remains from annual licence fees to finance a buyback.

This is not a criticism of Fishcare, but rather of the Government’s approach to funding, and the way the recreational fishing licence has been used to cover costs formerly accepted as part of the Government’s obligation to anglers around this state. It is worth remembering that anglers are a source of income to this State and particularly rural communities. According to a study by Ernst and Young, (2008) recreational anglers contribute in Victoria \$825m to the Gross State Product and recreational fishing contributes 5200 jobs in Victoria.

It is very hard to understand why, at the same time as this contribution is being made by recreational anglers, their licence contributions to their sport are being used by a Government to replace its funding responsibilities, like the employment of Fisheries Officers and many other programs. This current decision just adds to that list and in turn reduces the availability of funds for angler-initiated projects. Anglers should be aware that in the future there is a likelihood that Government will suggest a rise in the cost of angling licences and an extension of the licence to cover the over 60’s who are an increasing part of our population structure, and are reflected in the numbers in the recreational fishing community. All anglers should keep in mind the manner in which successive Governments have utilised the contribution of anglers made through their licence fees to cover shortfalls in the fisheries budget.

Cost Recovery and Commercial Fishing

I was recently reading a document from Fisheries Victoria, the Regulatory Impact Statement on increased costs in the commercial fisheries, which was put out for comment until the 24th of September. The basis of this

document is to recover costs associated with research, management, administrative and compliance costs, from commercial licence holders, which in turn means a substantial rise in commercial licences fees. This has recently been the subject of some newspaper reports.

Now recreational anglers should keep in mind a paper presented by Fisheries Victoria in October 2011 entitled [“Future Fisheries Strategies-Proposals for Reform”](#) which had as its basis cost recovery by Fisheries Victoria of science management, and compliance costs and a sharing of resources or re-examination of access to the fisheries resource **for recreational** and commercial fishing. We have heard little more of this 44 page document, however we were so concerned that we brought out a special newsletter at the time alerting anglers to this paper that was called by the Director of Fisheries Management “a very high level technical document.” [Now I make the point that perhaps the cost recovery concept that is currently being applied to the commercial fishery may also in turn be applied to the recreational fishery in this state using increased licence fees as the method.](#)

As an example of the current proposals commercial fishermen of the Gippsland Lakes currently pay \$2274 for an access licence to net the Gippsland Lakes. It is proposed that this will increase to \$9517 by 2015/16 or a 318% increase. The Sydenham bait licence currently \$368 will increase to \$2645 or by 618% by 2015/16 under this proposal, and this must mean increased bait costs for anglers. Some of the increases are not as great such as the Lake Tyers bait licence, which it is proposed will rise from \$308 today to \$524 in 2015/16, which is a rise of 70%. Fisheries Victoria in this paper estimates that the cost of services provided to Gippsland Lakes commercial fishermen will be in 2015/16 \$128,000 and that they will recover \$90,000 with the introduction of the increased licence.

An added problem for recreational anglers at this time is that if an increase is proposed in the recreational licence fee it is difficult to see who will represent their interests, given the seeming total inactivity of VRFish the peak body for recreational anglers.

Fisheries Staffing Decline Alarming

When browsing through the details of the cost recovery proposals that were covered in three papers and is referred to in the above item, I was alarmed to see declining figures for the levels of employment in Fisheries Victoria in key areas that affect recreational anglers. In the area of compliance in 2008/9 there were 101 Fisheries Officers, however this number was reduced to 85 in 2013/14 **despite almost \$2 million being taken from Recreational Fishing Licence funds provided by anglers, to employ an additional ten Fisheries Officers.** [Of greatest concern was the area of Fisheries Research which had 61 scientists and workers in 2008/9, and which has declined in 2012/13 to only twenty scientists and workers in this key area.](#)

From these figures, it would appear that in 2010/11 when the current Government came to power the number in the scientific area was 47, and so a marked decline of 50% of scientific staff has occurred under this government. The decline in science staff since 2008/9 has been a massive 66%. To allow this to happen is hardly the action of a Government committed to the preservation and improvement of recreational and commercial fisheries in this state.

Readers might well remember the protests at the Queenscliff scientific section of Fisheries Victoria (MAFRI) highlighted in issue 63 (Nov.2012) when it was suggested by one of this states key scientists, that scientists in this branch might be reduced to 14. We are well on the way to achieving this alarming level in our key scientific area. Perhaps the Minister might like to provide a Media release explaining this level of staffing.



A key scientist had stated, *“Yes black bream stocks are at an all time low. My research started explaining some of the environmental reasons behind the reduction in stock, but it also signified significant gaps in our knowledge. With these cutbacks going ahead I can be fairly confident that there will be no black bream research in Eastern Victoria coming out of Fisheries Victoria.”* (Issue 63 page 4)

On a personal level, some three or more years ago I was summarizing the findings of a research paper for readers in almost every edition of Around the Jetties. Currently I doubt I have seen a research paper in the last eighteen months and this gives some indication of a declining level of fisheries research. These documents also indicate that commercial fishing in this state and aquaculture employ 1700 workers and this sector has a capital investment of over \$1 billion, whilst the product produced by the sector is valued at \$70 million per annum.

Feathers a Big Business in Fly Fishing

Many years ago when tying my own flies for my weekend trout fishing trips to the Nariel Creek near Corryong, I was in need of some peacock hackle, and at that time could not get any from the local store. I had a brilliant idea that I would include in my weekly school newsletter a request for peacock tail feathers, and that I was prepared to pay students 20 cents per feather. In the next couple of days I received about 40 wonderful tail feathers, and whilst today I no longer tie flies other than an occasional surf fly, I still have half a dozen of these feathers on my desk.

These memories came flooding back as the result of reading an article in the [Weekly Times Farm magazine \(Sept 2013\)](#) entitled “Fair Feather Friends.” This story describes John Webb and Joy Whittaker’s 5-acre farm at Swan Reach, which produces feathers for fly tying and milliners. A considerable amount of the feathers go overseas for salmon and trout fly tying, however the biggest market is for millinery. A white peacock tail eye sells for \$3 each and what was surprising was that the feathers from a white peacock could earn in its lifetime \$8,000.



The article indicates that the “most expensive price so far is for a Reeve’s pheasant ring neck cross tail of 16 feathers that sold for \$220.” Pelts of skin and feathers also sell and these provide the basis for a large number of flies for the amateur tier. (Pheasant Pelt Shown)

The farm has about 100 peacocks including 70 whites, and surprisingly the article states these birds live up to 30 years of age. As well as the peacocks the couple have a range of pheasants and silky fowls that are often used as mothers for pheasant eggs.

John was a dedicated fly fisherman as was his father, and when he and Joy moved to Swan Reach in 1970 they kept several pheasants, however it wasn’t until a local expert fly tier who specialised in salmon flies approached him

for a pelt that he realised the business prospects associated with the feather industry. On a visit to the farm some years ago, I was taken into the most wonderful room totally full of all types of feathers from floor to ceiling, and this room would have been a fly tiers absolute heaven.

When passing the farm on the edge of the Tambo River it is a great to see the variety of birds inside the high boundary fence that provides protection from foxes. This is a very special farm and a grand article by Sarah Hudson captures this with some wonderful photographs.

The result of such a business can be seen in the fly-fishing pursuit of an angler such as Andrew Martin of Marlo who follows his love of fly-fishing to areas around Australia, and the attached photo is of a sailfish recently caught off Exmouth in WA. This fish was not weighed as it was released without being brought onto the boat, but general estimates had it in the 60-80kg range.

Andrew indicated that one of the great areas for fly-fishing in the north is Christmas Island, which provides a great



variety of fish that can be caught on the fly. Interestingly he has hooked marlin on the fly in the north Australian waters.

I would imagine the early fly fishermen on the English streams fishing for trout, grayling and salmon would never have had a vision of where the original sport would be taken by anglers such as Andrew. In "The Compleat Angler" written in 1655, Izaak Walton describes tying a fly in great detail holding a hook in the fingers; but when it came to bream it was bait using worms and gudgeon, and always ground baiting the area to be fished.

On the local front Andrew catches, bream, estuary perch on normal fly patterns and luderick on a fly pattern representing green weed in his home waters of Marlo.



This is how the Klingon Fly started out and how it ended up with bent hook after its encounter with the sail fish



Gippsland Boating Coastal Action Plan a Public Relations Disaster

In March 2012, The Gippsland Lakes Coastal Board introduced an 89 page Gippsland Boating Coastal Action Plan. Many readers would recall the furore and anger over the plan for Bemm River, which could have meant when the estuary was high, access would have been denied to anglers. Of course this would have had a profound effect on the economic survival of this delightful community and would have affected access to anglers around the state who come to Bemm River. This report had many other areas of concern and this resulted in a flood of submissions to the Coastal Board including one from local member Tim Bull.

Over the intervening eighteen months, nothing was heard of this Action Plan. I thought I would try to find out what had happened to it after all this time.

The revised Coastal Boating Action Plan was forwarded to the minister in mid 2012, and last month, I am informed **the Coastal Action Plan was endorsed by Minister Ryan Smith**. The Minister also informed the Coastal Board that he wants an overarching coastal plan that subsumes the Boating Coastal Action Plan of 2012. I am informed that the Coastal Board will now discuss **whether they will release the Boating Coastal Action Plan of 2012 given that with the Minister's current request for a Coastal plan that includes boating**.

The 2012 plan may now no longer be relevant. Natasha Vasey-Ellis, an employee of the Coastal Board, indicated that the board had been waiting a considerable time to obtain a response from the Minister. Now it seems highly possible that those who provided submissions to the board, may never see the revised Boating Coastal Action Plan that was submitted to the Minister, with the changes emanating from local submissions. Apart from the lack of transparency this exercise probably cost in excess of \$100,000 to employ Ainley Projects to develop the original 2012 Coastal Boating Plan and produce an 89-page document. This does not take into account the extra costs associated with responding to a document that aroused public anger. The cost of producing this report was never made public.

Around the Jetties produced a special issue on this plan and issues 56 and 57 (March and May 2012) dealt with it in some detail. In early 2012, we went to a meeting of angry and concerned locals at Bemm River who explained their concerns to Ms Helen Martin, Chairman of the Gippsland Coastal Board, without achieving a satisfactory response and particularly on the question of consultation on the issue of local boat ramps.

The following announcement still appears on the Gippsland Coastal Boards website dealing with the 2012 Boating Plan

“All submissions have been considered and summarized with a discussion of how changes have been made to the document based on each of these submissions. These will be included on our website in the near future. Watch this space for announcement. The final step will be to send it to the Minister for Environment and Climate Change for signing then release as a final document.”

After eighteen months waiting I think readers can give up watching this space. Most would realise this exercise has been a total waste of time and money, apart from the fact that the East Gippsland Shire responded with a plan for the upgrade of the Bemm River ramp and surrounds. However, the first elements of that plan were discussed with the Bemm River community before the 2012 Boating Plan was published.

The Coastal Board membership has changed and East Gippsland Shire Mayor, Dick Ellis, is now the acting chairman. However, hundreds of hours of work in preparing submissions by members of the public, and thousands of dollars of taxpayer’s money has been wasted in developing a report that may never be released. The Gippsland Lakes Coastal Board and the Minister have achieved little credit from this saga, particularly given the 18 months of inaction and the lack of any communication to those who responded to this plan with submissions.

Rock Banking in our Rivers

A week or so ago I launched my boat at Johnsonville and went towards the mouth of the Tambo River for a couple of hours fishing. I hadn’t been down the river for some time and I was surprised at the amount of rock dumped to protect the banks of the river. The days of pulling your boats nose into the bank were gone and one had to anchor off shore to fish. Every boat entering the river almost without exception created a wash that just threw anchored boats around. It wasn’t a pleasant experience and I doubt I would fish the lower river from a boat again. This of course specifically affects the bait angler who fishes from a single spot whilst the chaps fishing lures and soft plastics just cruise quietly using their electric motors.

When I got back to the ramp, I got talking to an old chap who made the observation that, “since the rock banking of the banks of local rivers the fish numbers in the rivers had declined” and he suggested the rivers had been turned into channels.

I recalled a comment from Bruce Robinson former co-ordinator of VICTAG on this question published in Around the Jetties Issue 38 in September 2010 that is worth recalling.

Bruce wrote-“The damage done by de-snagging our rivers cannot be underestimated. The token effort to correct this damage to the natural environment for native species is far less than adequate. Rock banking slows erosion caused by boat wash, however tree roots provide a far better erosion control as they mat everything together. The rock banks may slow erosion but they are not as effective as the wave blasts through the gaps in the rocks and effectively washes out the soil from behind the rock wall, which then falls into the river. The Tambo River Rough Road area is testament to this. Log stacks provide a significantly reduced habitat it does not provide the habitat required for the sustainment of a species. A few stacked 200mm logs dropped into a river may provide some shelter to the larger of the species but they certainly do not provide the protection for the entire family as the head of a natural snag would.”



In 2010 in a study on resnagging from the Murray Darling Basin Commission suggested that work needed to be undertaken on the effects of the current input of logs into our rivers and the required configuration needed to attract fish and support native species. A local study on the effects of placing snags in local rivers is now being sought by a number of fisheries scientists and perhaps some of the funds being provided from Recreational Licence fees to the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority could be used for this research. At the same time some research should be undertaken on the effect of rock banking on the local species, after all over \$1 million has been provided to the local authority from Recreational Anglers Licence Fees. Perhaps a short pause and an examination of the effects of rock banking and the impact on fish populations is warranted. By the way, in Issue 6 August 2007, a reader wrote to me indicating that he stood on a snag placed in the river and it collapsed as it was riddled with Teredo worm. A question still remains as to the length of life these snags will have.

Letters Letters Letters Estuary Perch Again

I received the following note from Chris Hoyne (7th September) that adds to the discussion of estuary perch and their movements in the Gippsland estuaries. This discussion has risen from the case being developed by the Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club for a stocking of estuary perch in Lake Tyers. It is worth noting that several of the submissions made when the Lake Tyers Management Plan was being developed included a request for a stocking of estuary perch into Lake Tyers. In the early eighties over 1.8 tonnes of estuary perch were netted in the estuary. Since that time the catches of this species have been very rare.

Chris puts forward another point of view supported by some information from former co-ordinator of VICTAG Bruce Robinson. (See last issue of Around the Jetties)

Chris writes-

There you go Lynton- if perch can travel from Perry's (where I have caught them) right down through Wellington, down the straits- (where I have caught many-and released many-and been busted off too!) through the lakes to Lakes Entrance (where I have caught them under the barge until it was moved) and then out and down to McLaughlin's- where I have caught many and I don't fish for them any more, just leave them alone. Then they will easily leave Lake Tyers and go visiting anywhere from NSW to the Prom I reckon- there are heaps through out Gippsland so I think we need to accept that we don't need to stock them, thinking they will stay in one place for us to catch. Its like ducks-they are Australian not Victorian (although each year the Victorian Government does a count before they announce the season and bag limits) they move where they want to in order to get a feed. If perch wanted to be in Lake Tyers they would be there- and they probably are!

Regards

Chris

Editor

Thanks Chris for this email. I just wish I had your luck with estuary perch, however I must add I have never actually targeted them specifically. You provide an interesting argument that can probably only be resolved by a trial stocking of this species and an evaluation of the results. I also wonder at the



lack of research into the movement of this species between estuaries. A study was undertaken on the movement of estuary perch in the Snowy River when 23 estuary perch were fitted with an acoustic tag and the movements were tracked. This took place in 2003/4 and was reported on in 2010 by fisheries scientist John Douglas. Whilst there was considerable diurnal movement of perch in the river there was no evidence of the tagged fish leaving the estuary, however it must be said that whilst the estuary was open to the sea, there was not a great tidal movement according to the report.

By the way, an odd stocking of estuary perch took place in Hamilton in the Western District on the 22nd March 2000 when 1000 estuary perch were stocked in Lake Hamilton. I understand that a flood removed those fish into a creek and my information is, that not a single fish was taken by anglers or ever heard of again.

Round Table Forums Defended

I received the following email from Don Ellis President of the Metropolitan Anglers Association on the 20th September

Dear Lynton

I note your concern in the September issue of "Around the Jetties" regarding the representation of Recreational Anglers at the State-wide Forum conducted quarterly at the head office of the DEPI.

Representing the Metropolitan Anglers Association (MAA) I am a member of the Roundtable Forum and can assure you that issues raised by recreational anglers are widely discussed at these forums and that regional issues are not infrequently considered. An issue that I raised at a recent forum was the predation of black bream by masses of cormorants in the Gippsland Rivers and that no recent study had been undertaken by Fisheries Victoria.

As a result Fisheries have undertaken to conduct an up to date research project on the problem using recent international research. I can assure you the forum is not city centric since many of the MAA anglers regularly fish in regional areas and don't hesitate to tell the association of problem areas. Accordingly, I have raised many matters at respective forums. If you have issues that you would like to be raised at future forums I would be most happy to debate those issues at the forums.

Don Ellis President of the MAA.

Editor

I thank Don for this email, and I am pleased to see Don taking up issues on behalf of regional anglers. This in no way answers my concerns regarding the secretiveness of this forum, its membership, and the seeming lack of regional representatives to take up issues themselves. At the meeting held on the 25th July, 23 representatives attended and not one of those present represented a specific regional area. However Fishcare, the Trailerboat Fisherman's Magazine, Boating Industry Association etc. all were invited members of this roundtable meeting to discuss recreational angling matters with Fisheries Victoria managers and heads of departments. Despite Terms of Reference stating that the Chairman will produce a Chairpersons report of the mutually agreed outcomes for each forum meeting, which would be circulated by Fisheries Victoria, I am unaware that anglers across the state have ever seen a report on matters discussed at these meetings and it would appear that in the seven years this body has operated, no report of its activities has ever been available to anglers. Just at the moment with the paralysis of VRFish, and the secrecy of the Roundtable Forum, recreational anglers have little representation and this could be said to extend to the Ministerial Advisory Committee on the Gippsland Lakes.

Regarding your efforts to bring cormorant predation to the notice of forum members I would suggest there are many other issues of greater importance in East Gippsland, and these include

- the lack of protection of spawning black bream at the mouth of rivers in the Gippsland Lakes,
- the effects of salinity on the lakes and its effect on fish populations and recreational fishing,
- the wastage of money on projects put forward by Fisheries Victoria using Recreational Licence Funds eg, stocking prawns in Lake Tyers (\$225,000) and
- the stocking of bass in the Nicholson River with no access to the Gippsland Lakes to spawn (\$100,000)
- and issues such as the commercial netting of surf beaches,
- and access to areas of Lake Tyers for anglers

and many others that could be listed and are regularly quoted in this fishing newsletter.

Regarding cormorants, John McNally undertook a major study in 1957 using the stomachs of 1,900 cormorants shot on the Lakes. This project will never be repeated because today the cormorant's population is protected. In February 2001 Jim Reside and Patrick Coutin in a 53 page document reported on ["Preliminary estimates of the population, diet, and fish consumption of the Great Cormorant in the Gippsland Lakes"](#). I would recommend this and the McNally report to Don as providing answers on the predation of cormorants on black bream in the Gippsland Lakes and its rivers and draw your attention to a detailed item on Cormorants in Issue 65 February 2013 of Around the Jetties. As the issue of cormorants is still a concern and particularly when small fish are in the rivers, I have attached that item to this newsletter.

***I would make the point that the Chairman of VRFish the recreational Peak Body, representing the anglers of the state is a member of this State-wide Recreational Roundtable, but anglers have heard nothing of the deliberations of this body even when papers are being presented on the issue of increases in recreational fishing licences that may directly affect them.

Correction

Ross Winstanley, Recreational Fishing Researcher has drawn my attention to an error in my summary of the paper on the Recreational Fishing Licence. Issue 72 Around the Jetties page 8

I wrote “In this state 720,000 Victorians fish, however just 24% of them pay 85% of the annual RFL revenue whilst 85% of those who fish pay nothing and receive the same service with fish stocking access etc.

Ross Winstanley Correction – “In fact the first part is true- the 24% of 720,000 recreational fisher who bought 1-year or 3-year licences in 2011/12 paid 85% of the RFL revenue for the year, but the 18% who bought 28 day or 2 day RFL’s contributed the other 15% of RFL revenue. **That left around 420,000 or 58% of the total number of fishers who paid nothing.** That’s still an unacceptably high section of the total who in the terms of the Department of Treasury and Finance cost recovery guidelines are “free riders” so the point you make still stands.”

Editor- This was my mistake in summarising a large number of statics to a readable level, and I thank Ross for drawing my attention to this.

Around the Jetties on Line

We are pleased to announce that Around the Jetties can now be sourced on the Lake Tyers beach website- www.laketyersbeach.net.au

The newsletter will still be emailed to readers and of course those who do not have access to email facilities will still receive hard copies. Now those with email facilities will be able to direct friends and other anglers to Around the Jetties on this website and they will be able to access back copies. Currently the most recent four back copies are on the website and future newsletters will add to this source of information.

This is a great site with fishing news; local accommodation available at Lake Tyers and local weather plus reports on the lake and this is always interesting to anglers.

Thanks to Rob Ward for the work he has undertaken to provide this access to Around the Jetties.

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

Cormorants Attachment

Cormorants on the Mitchell River

I was interested in recent comments regarding the number of cormorants on the Mitchell River. My initial reaction was to wonder given the recent work undertaken by Fisheries scientist Joel Williams that indicated that black bream were spawning very close to the Highway bridge on the Mitchell last year, then the cormorants could be feeding on very small bream or alternately there may be small fish from last years spawning event. There would be very little cover for these small fish as the Mitchell does not provide seagrass, and this is regarded as being most important for the survival of small fish and therefore cormorants working together in the Mitchell River may easily take the fish. It is surprising that pelicans working the same area are not reported as accompanying the cormorants as this often occurs on the Tambo River. There have also been authoritative sightings of large numbers of small bream and perch moving up the Mitchell River.

Whilst the problem of cormorant predation on fish stocks has been recognised for over 100 years as shown in the following statement;

“The Lakes are becoming full of shags. They destroyed immense quantities of fish, and increased very rapidly. They were worse than rabbits, but a reward of threepence per head for them would clear them off.”

James Smith to the Select Committee upon the Fisheries Industry of Victoria 26th July 1892”

Peter Synan’s book “Highways of Water” Published 1989 ;

it is only in relatively recent years that the problem has been studied.



Cormorants feeding in the Tambo River

In 1957, scientist John McNally reported on a survey of the large Black Cormorants that involved the shooting of 1995 cormorants and examining their stomachs over the period 1949-1955. This was important, as such a survey would not be carried out in future years and of course today the cormorant, is a protected species. McNally suggested from his research, that in the estuarine environment bream comprised 30% of a Great Black cormorants diet, and mullet also provided another 30%, with crustaceans and other small fish providing the balance of food intake. There is little doubt that the cormorant has an influence on stocks of black bream and mullet. McNally’s research indicated that the large black cormorant weighed on average 5.5lb and ate around 1.5lb of food per day of which around half a pound was black bream.

Of course cormorants with jaws that are capable of considerable distension, are capable of eating quite large fish, and I have an old photo of a cormorant with a 1.5lb brown trout that had been removed from its stomach, however it is generally agreed that cormorants favour small fish, and work as a team to catch them. Small fish depend on sea grass for protection, so it would seem to be easy for cormorants to obtain food in the Mitchell at the moment.

A further survey was undertaken in 1997, and published in 2001 by Jim Reside and Patrick Coutin, however because the birds could not be shot, the survey largely consisted of obtaining the regurgitated stomach pellets of cormorants from the Salt Creek roost, and examining these pellets to determine what the cormorant was eating. This survey reported that in the previous ten years the population of Great Cormorants varied from 200 to 7,800 around the Gippsland Lakes with at least 70% of the population nesting at the major Salt Creek roost, close to where the three major rivers including the Mitchell enter the Gippsland Lakes. This 2001 survey indicated, *“In 1998 Great Cormorants may have consumed about the same weight of black bream, yellow eyed mullet and luderick as the combined commercial and recreational catch.”* In 1998 based on stomach contents of the few birds captured with cannon nets the total fish consumption by black cormorants was estimated to be 261 tons of which black bream accounted for 126 tons. (The commercial catch of black bream in 1998/9 was 164 tons.) It should be noted that cannon nets were used in an attempt to catch Great Cormorants, however only three were caught and four drowned. These birds provided the basis for determining stomach contents, however a study of regurgitated pellets provided other evidence. This demonstrates the difficulty of getting information on the effect of the great Cormorant on the stocks of black bream, and perhaps the increasing importance of the 1957 McNally report given the number of cormorant stomachs that were sampled. The McNally report concluded stating, *“In estuarine waters the Great Black cormorant could be a predator of some significance on commercially valuable bream and mullet in the Gippsland Lakes”*

The 2001 report suggested annual surveys of cormorant populations and more surveys of regurgitated pellets to establish an estimate of fish consumption in the Gippsland Lakes should be undertaken but I am unaware of any further research on this question.

Large numbers of Great Cormorants breed along the Murray River and in inland lakes such as Lake Eyre and the Menindee Lakes after flooding, and then disperse to waters such as the Gippsland Lakes when the inland waters dry up.

The daily consumption of food is relatively similar in the two studies referred to here with McNally suggesting the great Cormorant having a daily intake of 1.5lbs, whilst the work of Reside and Coutin would suggest that the Great Cormorant would consume between 15% and 18% of its body weight with only a portion being black bream and mullet, however both studies found small black bream the predominant food.

I have attended Fisheries Victoria black bream stock assessments for the Gippsland Lakes over many years, and the impact of Great Cormorants on stocks of black bream has never been discussed in any detail, as far as I am aware, although the issue has been raised by recreational anglers on a number of occasions, the last being the 2012 Black Bream stock assessment. Given the lack of sea grass cover where the black bream are now thought to be spawning and the historically low numbers of black bream, the impact of Great Cormorants on this important species of fish should be considered as a priority. Whilst there are a number of species of cormorants on the Gippsland Lakes the Great Cormorant is the most abundant according to Reside and Coutin

Reside and Coutin concluded their study saying, “Fisheries management plans should allow for sudden increases in predation of pre-recruits that may reduce the biomass of black bream and impact commercial and recreational catches.”

The question is unanswered as to whether any fisheries management plans currently take account of the effect of the Great Cormorant on fish stocks and particularly black bream,

Control Of Cormorants

McNally in his research in 1958 indicated that no evidence existed to prove the culling of the Great Cormorant by shooting had any effect. This had been tried in the past, and a scheme for providing a bonus for birds shot had been discredited both in Australia and overseas. [There does not seem at this time any method of controlling the predation of the Great Cormorant on fish stocks](#), and it needs to be remembered that cormorant predation applies to trout streams and inland waterways. I am aware of a program undertaken in Vermont and New York in the United States of oiling cormorant eggs. This was carried out on 7500 pairs of birds, and this eliminates the process of hatching. The eggs must be left in the nest otherwise more eggs would be laid. Whilst successful it would seem this would be labour intensive and thus very expensive and very difficult to organise given the areas where cormorants nest including areas along the Murray Darling Basin.

It would appear that the problem of cormorant predation of fish stocks, which has been with us for over 150 years, would remain a talking point when anglers meet. It seems there is considerable evidence of what is happening but Fisheries Victoria and recreational anglers have no current means of controlling cormorant predation of valuable fish stocks, and they provide an added threat to black bream stocks in the Gippsland Lakes in particular

Source- Black Bream in the Gippsland Lakes- In Crisis Fact or Fallacy (2000) L.G.Barr.