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Around the Jetties

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An Anglers Newsletter

“The art of bottom fishing is that of letting the fish come to the fisherman, instead of vice versa....Bottom fishing in short, is the thinking man’s fishing.”

Louis .D. Rubin Jr. “The Even Tempered Angler (1983)”

Editorial



Welcome to 2014, and I hope it will be a productive year for anglers. My assessment of the holiday period after talking to numbers of anglers has been that the fishing for black bream and dusky flathead in the Gippsland Lakes has seldom been worse, whilst the fishing in Lake Tyers has slowed considerably with local anglers doing reasonably, but visiting anglers finding conditions quite difficult.

The number fishing in the Gippsland Lakes and Lake Tyers are well down on previous years and this is only to be expected with the seeming decline in catches.(1) On the other hand anglers journeying well off shore have had some fine catches, but this does little to compensate for the decline in catch rates in the Gippsland Lakes. Of course, this decline is based on anecdotal information, as we have no research on current catch rates. Perhaps a study of catch rates might have

been a good starting point for the Ministerial Advisory Committee to determine the state of the Gippsland Lakes recreational fishery.

Despite evidence of a decline of catch rates, commercial netting continues and recreational anglers provide tacit support by accepting bag limits for bream, and a strict 5 bag limit for dusky flathead with no fish over 55cms being legal. The commercial fishermen have no bag limit for black bream and no bag limit for dusky flathead and, they may take and market any dusky flathead over 55cms even though this would seem to raise concerns over the long-term sustainability of this species. A major research project was undertaken in 2002 showing that fish released from haul seines had a survival rate in excess of 80% with some species having a survival rate of 100%.(2) Whilst this study dealt with Corner Inlet and Port Phillip Bay, one might suspect the results to be similar for the Gippsland Lakes. If this is the case, one can only wonder why the regulation protecting large breeding dusky flathead and accepted by recreational anglers has not been applied to commercial fishermen.

There is an urgent need for a scientific assessment of the key recreational and commercial species in the Gippsland Lakes. Again, it is strange that the South East Trawl fishery off our coast works to a species quota scientifically determined, yet the commercial fishermen of the Gippsland Lakes take all the fish they can net with no limitation. Given the dramatic decline in the black bream population, and indications of a decline in dusky flathead in the Gippsland Lakes, then it would seem obvious that unlimited catches of these

and other species are not in the interests of a sustainable long-term fishery. The savings made by the acceptance of bag limits by recreational anglers are quickly eroded by the total lack of any quotas on commercial netting. Add to this the removal of spawning fish from the mouths of rivers and the massive commercial catches in flood events, together with environmental changes such as increased salinity and lack of river inflow, and we have a recipe for ongoing decline in the Gippsland Lakes recreational fishery.

Finally, you will often hear commercial fish supporters suggest that the catch from the lakes supplies local restaurants and tourists who like to eat local fish. The local fish tourists eat in restaurants comes off trawlers and not from the lakes fishery. On two surveys conducted by this newsletter it was found that it was impossible to get a meal of black bream in any Lakes Entrance or Bairnsdale restaurant. The Gippsland Lakes Taskforce led by Professor Barry Hart, in a document termed A Report Card on the Natural Assets of the Gippsland Lakes, rated both recreational and commercial fishing in the Gippsland Lakes in September 2011 as poor and anecdotal information would suggest the situation has worsened since that report.

(1) Survey of boat trailers at Lake Tyers 9/1/2013-No 2 Ramp 12 boat trailers, Fisherman's Landing 3, Nowa Nowa 1. This was a fine morning with no wind and survey conducted between 9.00am and 9.30.am

(2) "The Effects of haul seining in Victorian bays and inlets" Knuckey, Morison, and Ryan 2002

Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Committees in Action

Fish Assessment in the Gippsland Lakes,

A Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Committee Reference Group (GLMACRG) has had several meetings looking at the possibility of arriving at a better method of determining fish stocks in the Gippsland Lakes and in particular black bream. The Ministerial Advisory Committee allocated \$75,000 to this project and a reference group was formed to undertake this study. This group will report to the Advisory Committee who may then advise the Minister, Ryan Smith, on the results.

The GLMACRG consists of members "invited to provide a broad knowledge and experience of the Gippsland Lakes fishery," according to Martin Richardson, executive Officer, and includes two lakes commercial fishermen including Advisory committee member Arthur Allen, and two recreational anglers namely Trevor Buck of VRFish and Dennis Crane. The GLMACRG also includes EGCMA CEO, Graeme Dear, and a number of Fisheries Scientists from both Fisheries Victoria and the Arthur Rylah Institute. The Project Manager is Paul Brown of Fisheries Victoria.

The work that has been undertaken involves using electro fishing, which is a new approach for salt water, to assess fish stock numbers.



Electro fishing has been used in inland and local rivers most successfully, but this is the first time the method has been applied to stock assessment in estuarine waters. This method is being compared with the use of new sonar technology. A comparison of the two methods is taking place, whilst at the same time evaluating these methods against the independent method used by Fisheries Victoria over the last twenty years - using a small trawl net over many locations, plus the contribution of recreational anglers and clubs and in particular the Diary Program, to make its assessment. It is important that the cost effectiveness and accuracy of methods is determined in this study with particular emphasis on black bream.

I am indebted to Simon Conran of Fisheries Victoria (fisheries scientist) for the outline of this project, and I become somewhat concerned that anglers across East Gippsland and wider have had no knowledge these meetings were taking place or the methodology being examined. The report to the Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Committee will be made by the end of the financial year. (30th June

2014) and they will then decide what advice they provide to the Minister. It is to be hoped the final report will be made available to anglers as well as the specific advice provided to the Minister and again Martin Richardson has stated, “It is intended that the final outcomes of the project will be made publicly available.” (In the past research reports have been made available to anglers, and this publication has provided summaries of numerous reports to anglers but this is not a report but rather a ‘set of recommendations.’)

Social Value of Fishing

Another major project to be undertaken by the Ministerial Advisory Committee is the identification and quantification of the social and economic value associated with the fishing activities on the Gippsland Lakes. This project will be undertaken by the DEPI as the project manager with EGCMA, VRFish, Arthur Rylah Institute, and Regional Development Victoria being part of the assessment. \$50,000 from the \$10 million allocated to the Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Committee over four years has been allotted to this project.

The economic value of recreational fishing in East Gippsland has been evaluated previously by VRFish as part of an Economic Study of Recreational Fishing in Victoria. This Study was conducted by Earnst and Young in 2009, when the recreational contribution of recreational fishing to Gippsland was \$172.9 million annually with 1,100 directly employed as a result of recreational fishing, however this study did not attempt to quantify the social value of recreational fishing nor did it directly apply to only the Gippsland Lakes.

Investigation of the Economic Value of Boating on the Gippsland Lakes

Later, a further study will be undertaken identifying and quantifying the social and economic value of boating on the Gippsland Lakes and a further \$50,000 has been allocated to this study. This project will be led by Gippsland Ports with input from the Boating Industry Association. An aim of this project as well as evaluating the economic impact of boating is to “manage the growth in boating activity and infrastructure.” What is meant by this statement is not explained and boat users are left to wonder.

Editor

It is to be hoped that when the study of the social and economic value of fishing is undertaken that the value of recreational fishing and the value of commercial fishing will be valued separately, so that a comparison of the input of both fisheries to the local economy can be examined and compared. What is also unknown is the intent of the statement that this study will “consolidate and refine fisheries management by understanding the community and economic values and contribution of fisheries activities.”

A number of questions arise from the fisheries study including the availability and reporting to the community of meetings being held, and certainly anglers should have access to meeting summaries and reports. The two anglers on this committee have no responsibility to report to anglers, as they were invited to participate not to represent a particular organisation, but rather to provide broad knowledge and experience. It is fairly easy for the ten commercial fishermen to meet with their two representatives on the reference group to discuss reports on assessment methods. It is much more difficult for recreational anglers associated with the Gippsland Lakes numbering hundreds, to have any input, and 99% of recreational anglers would not even be aware that these meetings were taking place or the intent or membership associated with this study. Since writing this item I have been provided with a press release entitled “Making fish count for the future” to be released on January 6th, prepared by the executive officer of the Ministerial Advisory Committee.

The Contribution of an Angler

I like many anglers find the facilities and area of the Johnsonville Boat ramp a delight and over recent years there has been constant development of this area by a keen group of locals. Recently Johnsonville angler Clive Blackwood, who has been a contributor to this publication, was the centre of attention when he was honoured by having an area named the “Clive Blackwood Garden.” Clive has been a wonderful contributor to this area and the following statement provides an indication of Clive’s input over the years.

“The Clive Blackwood Garden honours Mr Blackwoods dedicated efforts in leading the caretaking of the boat ramp



park, heading up the organisation of routine maintenance work and spearheading campaigns for the installation of the pontoon, disabled access ramps and railing, public barbecues, improved lighting, and the creation of a low maintenance garden with retaining wall in the park.” (Bairnsdale Advertiser 20th December 2013).

Clive provides an example of the quiet contribution of anglers to their sport. This boat launching area is a great credit to Johnsonville and I would go as far as saying I have not seen a better facility to cater for families, the aged’ and handicapped and those who just come to the area for a barbecue.. Over the years, Clive has been an advocate for the handicapped and drew the attention of this publication to the condition of fishing platforms on the Tambo River. After numerous letters to the east Gippsland Shire on the condition of these platforms, we were informed that the Shire was unable to advise who built them and who was responsible for them. For readers who do not know Clive he is a most active over 80, who fishes local waters including Lake Tyers regularly.

Estuary Perch Stockings in Victoria

On the 20th December the Minister Peter Walsh announced 50,000 estuary perch would be stocked in five Western District Lakes. The Minister said, “the fish had been released into Lake Bolac (35,000), Lake Struan (9,000), Lake Hamilton (4,000), Lake Beaufort (1,000), and Lake Pertobe (1,000).” The fingerlings being stocked are between two and 5cms in length and the Minister suggests they “will be of catchable size, which is 27cms within 3-5 years.” The perch stockings are jointly funded by revenue from the sale of licences as well as the Governments \$16 million Recreational Fishing Initiative. (\$4 million per annum.)

The Minister announced a second batch of estuary perch would be released into Albert Park Lake and Devilbend Reservoir in coming weeks. Volunteer anglers have helped in catching brood stock, which were transported to the Narooma Hatchery where the fish were bred.

Editor

It is worth noting that 7,000 estuary perch were stocked in Lake Bolac in January 2012 now a further 35,000 will be stocked in this lake that was dry in 2010. Now in all the announced stockings in western district lakes the stocked fish will supply sport for anglers, however, the fish will not spawn and so it will be a put and take fishery. Readers would be aware of the great interest in the approach of the Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club with its research to gain approval for a release of estuary perch fingerlings in Lake Tyers. The difference being that there is a chance that in Lake Tyers the fish will spawn and become re-established, after all a commercial fisherman netted 1.5 tonnes in the 1980’s so the fish were previously breeding in this estuary and perhaps there is every chance this will happen again. This seems a far more positive approach than a put and take fishery although it must be said there is a place for both.

Purchase of Estuarine Fish

On another but associated matter this publication has urged the development of a hatchery for saltwater fish in the TAFE facility at Bullock Island in Lakes Entrance. Estuary perch, bass, and black bream could be bred in this facility, which is currently deteriorating and falling into a state of disrepair. Previously bass and black bream have been hatched in this facility and whilst water problems killed thousand of small bass, the black bream (estimated 30,000) were euthanized following a successful fisheries management project conducted by TAFE, due to an agreement between Fisheries Victoria and TAFE that precluded their release into the Gippsland Lakes. This was reported in detail only in this publication.



This hatchery could become a tourist attraction and add to the estuarine fish resources of this state. If millions of freshwater fish can be bred at Snobs Creek, it is a wonder that a similar facility for estuarine fish is not established at Bullock Island, rather than catching brood stock in Victoria transporting the fish to Narooma to spawn, and then returning their progeny for release in Victorian waters.

Minister Walsh Goes Snapper Fishing

The Minister of Agriculture and Food Security recently took some time off to enjoy some snapper fishing in Port Phillip Bay with the executive team of VRFish whilst at the same time witnessing first hand the value of the snapper fishery to Victoria.

Minister Walsh said, “Snapper stocks are closely monitored by Fisheries Victoria and it is great to see high quality fishing experiences being enjoyed by so many Victorians.” He went on to say “The Coalitions \$16 million Recreational Fishing Initiative is delivering projects like fish stockings, upgrades like boat ramps and fish cleaning tables, new artificial reefs, education and enforcement.” Port Phillip Bay is a vital spawning ground for snapper and the 2013 snapper season has been very good with indications the recent good seasons will continue.

Russell Conway VRFish Chair noted recreational fishers make a significant contribution to the management of the snapper fishery with \$1 in every three from licence fees spent on education and enforcement, whilst \$1.8 million was spent on researching important coastal species such as mako sharks, snapper, King George whiting, and flathead between 2010/11-2012/13.

On this trip the Minister caught his first snapper.

Editor

Anglers from all over Victoria are travelling to Port Phillip Bay to take part in this fishery. One angler explained it was not uncommon to see thirty boats fishing in a single area. Some launching areas have up to six ramps and still there is difficulty in handling the boats and parking for the snapper fishermen. The value of this snapper fishery does not seem to have been specifically calculated, although the VRFish Economic Study of Recreational Fishing in Victoria undertaken by Ernst and Young (2009) suggested the recreational fishing contribution to the Melbourne/Port Phillip Region from recreational fishing was in 2008/9 \$228.8 million with an employment outcome of 1,400 persons.

This booming recreational fishery should be compared with the recreational fishing of the Gippsland Lakes and tributaries flowing into the lakes. Fifteen years ago, it was difficult to find a parking spot at the Johnsonville ramp; today one or two trailers are the normal sight at this ramp. The decline in the black bream fishery can best be illustrated by the decline in the commercial catch of this species. In 2001/2 the commercial catch in the Gippsland Lakes was 154 tonnes, in 2002/3 this catch had collapsed to 28 tonnes (1) and remains at that level apart from flood years when commercial nets remove spawning fish as they vacate the rivers with the flow of fresh water. **The black bream commercial fishery in the Gippsland Lakes is the last remaining commercial fishery for this species in Southern Australia.**

Fisheries Victoria -Commercial Fish Production Bulletin Oct. 2012

As an aside

Minister Peter Walsh may not have caught snapper previously but what is not generally known is that this year he is undertaking his sixth 404km five day Murray River Marathon that raises money for charity. This Minister for Agriculture and Food Security, whose responsibilities cover fishing in this state, would have an intimate knowledge of this great river from his long summer days paddling between Yarrowonga and Swan Hill. This year he is paddling with fellow national MP Tim McCurdy.

The Bemm River Issue

Readers will recall that in the last issue we publicised and supported the fact that the President of the Metropolitan Anglers Association, Don Ellis, was going to raise the matter of access to the Bemm River at the December meeting of the Statewide Round Table Forum. I received the following note from Don Ellis-
“Although it was requested that the Bemm River Issue be put on the December Roundtable Agenda I was advised by the Chairman Merv Maguire that there would be insufficient time to debate the matter. As it turned out most of the forum time was devoted to proposed changes to the Recreational Fishing Licence and



the Recreational Fishing Initiative 2014-2018. I was active at the meeting on both these issues. The Bemm River is not forgotten and I will be raising it at the next Roundtable in March 2014.”

I think Recreational Anglers should be somewhat concerned, not that the Recreational Fishing Licence is being discussed by the members of the Roundtable Forum but rather that **no information has been made available to anglers of this state on any proposed changes**. It has been noted previously that summaries of Forum discussion have been held up due to changes to the DEPI website, but this is hardly an excuse as summaries of discussions could have been made available to angling clubs by other means. Actually this publication raised the issue of the seeming secrecy of discussions and the lack of any transparency in August 2013, when it was acknowledged that no summaries of discussion of previous meetings since the formation of the Forum in 2009 had been made available to anglers. Since the meeting on September 13th, no summaries of discussion have been made available to anglers and so the charge of secrecy of discussions is hard for Fisheries Victoria and the Roundtable Forum to refute given that the Terms of Reference 2009 specifically stated, **“a summary of meeting outcomes will be circulated publicly via Fisheries Victoria’s website.”** **The Statewide Roundtable Forum** is made up of Fisheries Victoria Managers and persons jointly chosen by the chairman of the Roundtable and the Executive Director of Fisheries.

Recreational anglers will now wait to find out what changes are being suggested for Recreation Fishing Licences, and the use of funds derived from those licences as no report on this important discussion has been made available to anglers across the state.

This publication has alerted anglers to two papers prepared for the Statewide Roundtable Forum by Ross Winstanley, former Fisheries Victoria Manager of Inland Fishing, drawing attention to inequities in the current system, and it would be helpful if a summary of these papers were made available to anglers for their consideration, and club involvement.

Recreational Fishing Initiative 2013-2018

I had seen reference to the 2013-2018 Recreational Fishing Initiative in the discussions of the Roundtable Forum, but could find no information on just what this initiative was, either from the chairman of the Roundtable Forum or the Fisheries Victoria website. I did receive from Brian Mottram, Acting Director of Fisheries Management and Science a **“summary of several projects implemented as part of this initiative”** and for this information I am most grateful. However, again it demonstrates the lack of information being made available to anglers of this state who, after all, through their licences currently contribute around \$6 million to fishing in this state. The following (in italics) is the information provided by Acting Director Brian Mottram on this initiative.

“Improving recreational access and infrastructure (on track) 80 projects funded (61 completed 19 underway) at various locations around Victoria. All projects have written support from local recreational fishers. A number of additional projects are being negotiated with the relevant land managers. Gippsland locations include Lake Tyers, Port Welshpool, Avon River, Loch Sport, Nicholson River, Latrobe River, and Bemm River.

Editors Comment- Whilst Bemm River and Lake Tyers anglers would be pleased to hear of this initiative I wonder whether they or any of those listed have been provided with any information on these negotiations or their views sought on the areas of improved access being considered.

Fish Stocking (on track) The 2013 salmonoid stocking will be completed soon with more than 550,000 fish stocked. The 2013/14 native fish breeding season has begun with a combined total over 2,000,000 estuary perch, Murray cod, Silver perch, Australian bass, Trout cod, Macquarie perch, Freshwater catfish, and golden perch expected to be stocked over coming months.

Editors Comment- This is a great story particularly with news of the stocking of the iconic freshwater catfish, but again anglers have heard little detail of these achievements.

RecFishing Reefs (on track)- Reef units have been purchased, deployment contracts awarded and approvals obtained ahead of the deployment of 7 new reefs in Dec 2013 and Jan 2014 at Lake Tyers Mallacoota and the Gippsland Lakes .Tenders for the offshore recreational fishing reef will open on Dec 4th 2013 with deployment expected by July 2014

Editors Comment- Whilst pleased that this project is taking place, doubts still exist with many anglers that two small reefs of approx 7mx7m will provide any evidence of improved fish habitat or advantage to anglers in the Gippsland Lakes.

Improving consultation and engagement with recreational fishers (on track) DEPI held 11 regional public forums across Victoria and have hosted 2-statewide round table meetings with key recreational fishing stakeholders. The Victorian Fisheries smartphone application now has more than 80,000 subscribers.

Editors Comment- The public forums were excellent, and in the case of Gippsland where over 50 anglers attended, some anglers travelled over 100kms to attend on a terrible night...

Strengthening Fisheries Compliance (on track) Increasing weekend and public holiday rostering in line with increased fishing activity and the highest rate of offending.

Editors Comment, The recent appointment of 12 additional Fisheries Officers would support the increased rostering, however in Gippsland only one appointment (Mallacoota) has resulted.

Conduct priority research and development for rec fishing (on track) site selection for estuarine and offshore recreational fishing reefs, economic value of southern bluefin tuna, fish stock surveys in Devilbend Exhibition Pass, Lake Kerford, and Lake Sambell

Editors Comment. No priority research is listed for Gippsland other than the selection of reef sites. Perhaps this may be a result of the dramatic decline in the number of fisheries scientists in Fisheries Victoria.

In summary, I thank the Acting Director for this information, congratulate Fisheries Victoria on many of these initiatives, and again draw Fisheries Victoria's attention to the need to provide this information regularly to anglers across the state in a form that they can understand and appreciate. The Recreational Fishing Initiative 2013-2018 seems to be simply a listing of projects being undertaken by Fisheries Victoria.

*Note the Recreational Fishing Initiative suggests that the Bemm River access issue is currently being negotiated; only it appears the Bemm River community is not aware of this fact.

Lake Tyers Update

On the 8th of December, I had a late evening note from John Harrison, Secretary of the Lake Tyers Angling Club, indicating that **the lake had closed to the open sea at approximately 5.00pm on that day.** John stated that it was a big sea and high tide causing water to come over the sandbar but no water going out. John provided the statistic that the lake had been open for 173 days which compares with the average of 159 days open since 1983.

John was advised that the **remainder of the prawn larvae (1 million) would be released into Lake Tyers on Thursday 12th of December.** Of course, the closure of the lake should mean that this release would have the opportunity to grow and be harvested. Despite early gloomy forecasts of the number of prawns lost when the lake opened in June, it is now being suggested that less than 20% of the 300,000 released in February 2013 will have left the lake. On this occasion there was little publicity and no photographs of the release of the prawn larvae, to such an extent that the Bairnsdale Advertiser used a photo from last February of the local member taking part in the initial release of prawns in February to support his statement on the release of prawn larvae on the 12th December.

Little information on the growth of the prawns released in February is available, but Diary Angler and reporter for this publication Bob McNeil has reported in November catching a dusky flathead and seeing it

disgorge a 3-4 inch prawn on the floor of his boat. This prawn may well have been part of the original stocking. Whilst the Bairnsdale Advertiser stated, (Dec 18th) "The State Government has stocked one million more Eastern King prawns into Lake Tyers", in reality the project was funded from the sale of recreational fishing licences. In real terms, the project was initiated by Fisheries Victoria at a cost of \$225,000 and, with little local consultation and funded by recreational anglers' contribution through licence fees. The stocking of Lake Tyers follows a successful stocking by NSW Fisheries of the Merimbula Lake and Lake Wallagoot situated between Merimbula and Tathra and a study undertaken by Dr Mathew Taylor from the University of NSW of eleven estuarine areas in Victoria suitable for fish and prawn releases. The reason for the stocking of Lake Tyers probably relates to the need to assess the value of stocking estuarine waters following the 2009 paper on this subject by Dr Mathew Taylor of the University of NSW.



Photo Feb 2013 Sydney University Fisheries Scientists preparing to release prawn larvae into Lake Tyers.



Bob McNeil's Lake Tyers Report

The following report provides an angler's close view of the angling in Lake Tyers for the month of November and is derived from Bob McNeil's Research Angler Diary report and his written comments.

"Well what a change from my last monthly report. Catches improved bream being the main fish with only a few flathead due to mullet being unavailable as a bait early in the month. When mullet became available late in the month a few good catches occurred, and then the odd lapse in flathead numbers. The last few trips yielded only 2-3 flathead for 3-4 hours fishing.

Forecasting fish numbers is fraught with disaster, but here goes. Flathead sizes are good with an average in the mid 40cms, but no large collection of fish in any one spot. I have fished usually productive spots for 2-3 fish. At this time of the year fish are usually plentiful especially in the bottom lake where I do most of my fishing. Tourist angler numbers appear down on previous years. Are we seeing the results of a bad spawning year with more to follow as so far this year small flathead appear to be non-existent? This raises the following questions.

- (a) Is this cyclic with nature playing a numbers game?
- (b) Are we now overfishing this resource even with no professional fishing occurring?
- (c) Can Lure fishing be playing a big part in this?
- (d) Or has the long opening of the lake made the lake unsuitable for large groups of fish?"

Bob also indicated that tailor have started to become active and he expects more and larger tailor as the year progresses. The bream he caught were in good condition with most over 30cms. Bob supplied information on the dusky flathead catches for the same month over the last three years, and his catch has been 146 in November 2010/11, 186 in 2011/12, and has dramatically declined to 67 in 2013/14.

Bob even fished on Christmas day fishing from 5.00am to 9.30 and over the month had eighteen early morning outings for 67 dusky flathead, 54 bream (32size) and 6 tailor. In that catch there was not one dusky flathead under 40cms and the largest flathead was 60cms.

Editor

Thanks again to Bob McNeil for his detailed and thought provoking report. With regard to dusky flathead there still seems to be no dusky flathead under 40cms being caught in Lake Tyers and this may indicate the loss of a year class, which could have long-term effects on the fishery. It is doubtful if Fisheries Victoria would have the scientific staff to examine this anecdotal information from regular dusky flathead anglers, but it is most concerning. There is little doubt that the lack of a recreational fishery in the Gippsland Lakes and its tributaries has meant greatly increased fishing pressure on this small estuary. An added problem is the lack of research into dusky flathead in Victoria, and we largely rely on the research in NSW by Gray and Barnes into "Reproduction and Growth of Dusky Flathead (2008)" for information on this species.

As an Aside

Just before Christmas our regular contributor, Diary Angler Bob McNeil was fishing in the early morning (6am) in a heavy fog. Now Bob lost his way in the fog and found himself well aground in close proximity to the Lake Tyers settlement. After two hours the boat was still aground. Fortunately Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club Secretary returning from his mornings fishing passed Bob's boat, however when he had retrieved his boat he had sudden concerns as to just what was the situation with Bob's boat and just where was Bob. He relaunched his boat and went back to Bob's boat, only to find Bob alive and well, which was a relief. John, Bob and a member of the indigenous community joined together and got Bob's boat off the mud flats and our contributor on Diary Fishing was in a position to continue contributing to Around the Jetties. I must say I am relieved to have at least one other regular angler run aground in heavy fog. I am thinking of starting a club for fogbound anglers who run aground in Lake Tyers.

Odd Bits and More

Large Snapper Caught off Lakes Entrance

Lawrence Marshall sent me this photo initially of this magnificent snapper caught by his former neighbour and reader of Around the Jetties, Peter Owen of Nungurner, just before Christmas off Lakes Entrance. This fish was 85cms in length and weighed 8.6kgs which makes this fish around 19lb on the old scale.



Peter indicated he was fishing with a friend in his Grady White Seafarer 228 in approximately 35 metres, and on this day, they caught five good fish between 9.00am and 10.00am and then things went quiet. Peter said in the previous week they caught snapper up to 65cms in similar circumstances. Peter sums it up saying “certainly the best two days my friend and I have had out from Lakes Entrance and the biggest snapper we have caught, and this makes up for many less productive trips.” The bait for these fish was pilchards. It is great to hear of this fishing out from Lakes Entrance and it does compensate for the almost total lack of recreational fishing available to anglers in the Gippsland Lakes.

The Law and Recreational Anglers



East Gippsland Abalone Thief Gets 6 Months Gaol

A NSW man with previous convictions appeared in Sale Court on Monday 13th of January after being apprehended the previous weekend in East Gippsland with 120 abalone. He was sentenced to six months gaol on a charge of trafficking and possession of a commercial quantity of abalone. He was banned from any sort of abalone fishing activity in Victoria for ten years or possessing any commercial fishing equipment within ten kilometres of estuarine or marine waters. All the abalone equipment and vehicle were

seized and further charges were laid by police. Senior Fisheries Officer Trudy Schmidt said, “The penalty reflected the communities view in relation to those people who flout the law and steal abalone.”(1)

As well as the above, over the past week six men have been arrested whilst targeting Port Phillip Bay abalone having found to be in possession of hundreds of abalone. A Norlane man was apprehended by water police patrolling on water skis whilst he was scuba diving, and found to have 312 shucked abalone. His van and equipment were seized and he faces serious charges. In another case four men were found with 264 abalone, 166 undersized at Williamstown and a Craigieburn man was caught with 109 abalone at Black Rock with 64 of them undersize. The legal limit for abalone on open days is 5 per person and at the time these abalone were taken the waters were closed. All men were charged with indictable offences that can mean as much as ten year’s goal.

(1) Fisheries Media Release 16th January

(2) Fisheries Media release 17th January.

A Correction

I wonder if any anglers noticed the correction in the Lakes Post of January 8th-

“A paragraph in the 2013 Rewind (Year in Review) which appeared in last weeks Lake Post contained an incorrect statement. East Gippsland Newspapers incorrectly stated that the Lakes Entrance Fisherman’s Cooperative supported a ban on commercial fishing in the Cunninghame Arm. This is incorrect.

LEFCOL general manager Dale Sumner said that Cunninghame Arm was part of the waters open to commercial fishing, and licence holders are entitled to operate there subject to regulations.”

Editor

What a shame that this was incorrect, and that the wishes of ten commercial fishermen override the hopes of anglers that this water would become free of commercial netting. The Cunninghame Arm can be netted at night in the non-holiday period using a seine net of over 700 metres. This would be an ideal area for the elderly anglers who frequent Lakes Entrance over the winter months to drop in a line. It really does show little regard for tourism and elderly anglers.

Operation Tempus in Corio Bay

Minister for Agriculture and Food Security, Peter Walsh, announced on the 1st of January that Fisheries Officers would be out in force on the water and at boat ramps during the summer to “carry out inspections and educate fishers about Victoria’s fishing laws.” He stated “the operation will remind people about the need to fish sustainably and responsibly in Corio Bay and surrounding waters.” As well as this an \$80,000 survey of recreational; fishing activity will be part of the Tempus operation over the summer also in Corio Bay. In addition to the above, three new Victorian Government patrol boats have been added to Fisheries Victoria to strengthen Fisheries Victoria’s capacity to carry out enforcement. These boats are rigid hull inflatable vessels, which can travel at speeds of around 80 kilometres per hour



Editor The strengthening of enforcement in Fisheries Victoria is admirable and would be supported by anglers, whilst noting that 12 additional Fisheries Officers were appointed in November, one needs to remember the decline in the fisheries research division from 60 in 2008 to 47 members when this government came to power to 14 scientists today. As well the loss of outstanding fisheries scientists to other states, remembering Dr Joel Williams, former Victorian scientist who is now undertaking a study in Western Australia to “future proof black bream against environmental change.” This surely would have been a most relevant practical and urgently needed study for the Gippsland Lakes and have far more relevance than some of the projects being undertaken by the Ministerial Advisory Committee.

Bemm River

Don Cunningham has indicated that dusky flathead are starting to congregate at Bemm River in large numbers and they will become relatively easy prey for anglers. Whilst the area has had several visits from Fisheries Officers, he is hoping that Bemm River will be regarded as one of this areas hot spots with Fisheries Officers targeting anglers who take over the bag limits of dusky flathead in particular. Readers might remember that Don suggested as many as 20,000 dusky flathead were taken by anglers in the 2012/13 Xmas period. As far as Don is aware, Fisheries Victoria has not raised the issue of river access for anglers with local residents.

Seabird Contact Study

The Lakes Entrance News of January 15th had Seabird Contact Study as a heading for an article dealing with \$360,000 of Federal funding to reduce the impact of commercial fishing on seabirds. The article, with photos of local members Darren Chester and Tim Bull and Simon Borg of SEFTIA, went on to say, ‘**Seabirds and Gippsland Lakes fishermen are poised to be big winners from a new initiative.**’ Actually, the new initiative does **not apply to Gippsland Lakes fishermen** at all, but rather the offshore South East Trawl fishery and is another initiative of that body to introduce worlds best practice to their fishery. From reports to Around the Jetties there is a good case for seabird protection measures to be applied to mesh net fishing within the Gippsland Lakes. Congratulations to the South East trawl which sets new standards with strict species quotas and protection of seabird life.

Your VRFish Update 16th January

Dallas D’Silva VRFish Executive Officer



Corio Bay- VRFish has held meetings with commercial fishers to reduce “on water” conflict and improve angler access to Corio Bay. VRFish has a long standing policy on netting in bays and inlets. A working group will be established to promote sustainable fishing.

Lake Toolondo- VRFish has expressed concern at the falling water levels in Lake Toolondo SW of Horsham. Almost 100,000 brown and Rainbow trout were stocked in this lake over the last two years after the lake went dry during the drought. These fish have reached around 1.5kgs. VRFish attempted to negotiate an allocation of water with GWM water and Iluka mining to protect this lake, so far without success.

Dartmouth Reservoir- Joy Sloan formerly of DEPI and now of the North East Anglers Association has been advocating improved access to the water. VRFish is very supportive of Joy’s efforts.

Boating Facilities- VRFish and the Boating Industry Association have a commitment from the Minister of Ports and Harbours to convene a special working group to provide practical solutions to boating needs and priorities.

Review of VRFish Structure- the VRFish Executive Officer has been asked to review future staff needs and structure. A review of the membership base will also take place.

VRFish Seeks Large Grants- Three proposals are being put forward. The first, is a study to quantify the contribution of recreational fishing to the Victorian economy. Another grant is sought to assess recreational fishing methods against marine park values, and finally, a pilot project to increase participation in angling by females.

Logo and Name- There was a general acceptance by the State Council of the benefits of a name change to ‘RecFish Victoria’ or ‘Recfish Vic’ and developing a more modern logo. The Executive Officer encourages support of this initiative that better describes recreational fishers and their organisation.

Meeting with Tim Bull- On the 4th February the Executive Officer will have a meeting with Tim Bull Member for East Gippsland.

Communication -VRfish is putting forward a proposal to the DEPI to forward an electronic newsletter to 100,000 Recreational Fishing Licence holders. DEPI have expressed initial support.

Editor- My thanks to the VRFish Executive Officer Dallas 'D'Silva for a most comprehensive fortnightly report, the above being a short summary of a number of the items from the seven page fortnightly report to members.. I suspect we are looking at a massive positive change taking place in the body that represent anglers in this state.

Still No action on Protection of Spawning fish at River mouths

Readers will be aware of the commitment of the Coalition prior to the last State Election. As a reminder the following was the commitment of the Coalition- **“The coalition would protect spawning fish by introducing controls on the practice of commercial netting near the mouth of rivers, and expand the artificial reef program to increase fish habitat.”**

The spawning fish include black bream , bass and estuary perch, and this protection is urgently needed. This protection must take into account the removal of black bream during flood events, but also the natural movement of black bream into the rivers to spawn and the regular movements back to the lake. According to Dr Joel Williams bream move into the rivers during the winter migrating in search of lowers levels of salinity and spawn from September to December. Estuary perch are thought to spawn in the lower estuary in November December, and then return to the rivers in January February. In the case of bass the migration and the spawning season may extend from the end of July through at least to the end of October. Bass are thought to move closer to the ocean and lowers estuary in the winter and spring. With local bass stocking and the possibility of perch stocking funded by recreational anglers these fish must be protected from commercial nets when undertaking their spawning movements and this can only be accomplished with the removal of nets that limit this natural movement from rivers to the estuaries and the return of these fish to the rivers.. Recreational anglers should be aware that in the five years 2007/8 to 2011/12 commercial nets removed 6 tonnes of bass and estuary perch from the Gippsland Lakes. *(Note the commercial statistics do not distinguish between bass and estuary perch, and these species are combined as estuary perch in the statistics.)*. This protection of spawning fish could best be accomplished with a 1kilometre netting exclusion zone from the mouth of rivers including the cut on the Mitchell.

Letters Letters Letters

More on the Maasbanker

I received the following letter from Chris Hoyne on the 7th December 2013.

“Hi Lynton

Regarding the Maasbanker- there is no doubt the crew of that boat purposely try to frustrate and intimidate anglers. I have been out fishing and had to pull up anchor and start the boat because I was not sure if the red trawler was going to run over me- it passed by that close it rocked my boat and the crew just stared at me. On another occasion it pulled up within 50 metres of me and started to run the net around the area I was fishing. I moved rather than cause a confrontation. When you consider it takes these salmon and sells them for Cray bait or pet food it is a disgrace for our fisheries managers to allow it to continue”.

Thanks Chris for this contribution. We have been concerned with the Maasbanker with 90 miles of remote beach to net, consistently netting areas where recreational surf fishers are fishing. We believe there should be an exclusion zone to allow recreational surf anglers to pursue their sport without having the area where they are fishing netted in close proximity to the beach. Your letter is the first that raises the issue of boat anglers being confronted by this trawler.

Letter from Dr Joel Williams,



I received the following letter on the 10th December, following an article in Issue 75 on the decline of the scientific staff in Fisheries Victoria. Dr Williams alerted anglers to this decline when he spoke at a protest meeting at Queenscliff and suggested the number of scientists would decline from 47 when this government was elected to a scientific staff of fourteen. I understand that is the current number of scientists today, and that is a massive decline.

“Thanks Lynton for the newsletter and the article about the loss of research in Victoria. What you said is very true and sad that we couldn’t get further funding to research black bream in the Gippsland Lakes. Fingers crossed times will change and I will return to Victoria hopefully”.

Dr Williams is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Centre for Fish and Fisheries Research at Murdoch University in Western Australia. His doctoral thesis was on environmental flows and spawning of black bream in the Gippsland Lakes. We can ill afford to have such scientists leave Fisheries Victoria.

Letter from a Reader

On the 19th December I received this letter from Andre Bokos of the Pakenham Angling Club.

Hello Lynton. Andre Bokos is my name and I am a member of the Pakenham Angling Club. I really enjoy Around the Jetties and I was really interested on the article on river access at the Bemm. Access is so important and personally I am not clear on the legal position. We need to know especially if challenged by landholders in one form or another. How can I get a copy of the ten page legal advice provided by Hall and Wilcox lawyers to VRFish dated 2003 please? Also does VRFish have a sister entity operating in NSW? Can you tell me what it is called and how I might make contact.

Keep up the good work.

Regards Andre Bokos

I provided a photocopy of the legal advice and suggested that Andre contact Dallas D’Silva of VRFish for information on a NSW entity. It is great to see an angler following up on this issue.

Letter in the Australian 29th December 2013

The following is an excerpt from a letter published in the Australian newspaper written by Peter Morse a leading Australian fly fisherman and author.

“For a model of what can be achieved, take a look at Lake Macquarie and talk to the residents who fish there. All commercial fishing licences were removed from those waters. Licence holders were bought out by funds from the NSW Recreational Fishing Licence. The lake is now a thriving healthy fishery.”

Peter Morse is the SBS presenter of Wildfish, a fly fishing consultant and the author of a number of books including “Saltwater Fly Fishing Fundamentals.” Perhaps this provides an indication of the best step to improve the recreational fishing in the Gippsland Lakes and with it tourism and the local economy. It is **strange that we have several commercial fishermen seeking the buyback to be put on the table with no response from the current Government.**

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 five 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.

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**