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Around the Jetties

March 2014

Issue No 78

An Anglers Newsletter

“The call of the river is basic to all mankind. It beckons the man in every boy, and the child in every adult. The fisherman homeward bound with fish in the bag is as complete a man as he wants to be. The empty handed angler usually maintains that it was a wonderful day in any case, but a couple of fish would have helped.”

Vic McCristal- Freshwater Fighting Fish (1964)

Editorial



Over recent years game fishing has grown as a sport that can bring millions of dollars to local communities as is the case with Portland where it is estimated the big game tuna fishing adds around \$9 million to community coffers per annum, and Warrnambool and Port Fairy are also sharing in this economic bonanza. In the last Around the Jetties it was pointed out by Anton Vogiatzis, President of the Victorian Game Fishing Club that Lakes Entrance and Point Hicks with the Bastion Point launching ramp will provide access and therefore the possibility of a million dollar game fishing industry off East Gippsland. Of course, those who can partake of this sport require an \$80,000

boat or they need to hire a charter. The average angler is not really part of this scene.

The unfortunate aspect of this development is that 25 years ago the Gippsland Lakes and its tributaries provided the basis for a million dollar recreational black bream fishery in which the average anglers with small boats or anglers fishing on the banks of rivers could participate, whilst at the same time contributing to the economic benefits of the community.

In the last 25 years, we have witnessed the collapse of the black bream fishery and successive Governments have watched this decline with never an investigation or inquiry to develop a master plan that would restore this fishery that once attracted thousands of anglers. Instead Governments have permitted the netting of the few black bream remaining, with no quotas and no restrictions.

Some funding has been provided to non-expert groups but it is doubtful if that funding will lead to any long-term benefits. The Gippsland Lakes are Victoria's largest estuary and 25 years ago provided a wonderful recreational fishery in which average anglers were able to participate at little cost.

Perhaps, in this state election year, we should be asking parties seeking our vote, where is the expert enquiry and the plans for the restoration of the black bream fishery of the Gippsland Lakes? After all, anglers contribute over \$6 million annually through their licences to funding fisheries in this state and if the recreational fishing licence is increased this figure could be \$12 million.

I must confess I sometime wonder at the lack of publicity on issues facing East Gippsland recreational anglers and just what the collapse in stocks of black bream have meant to local communities. This

publication is made available to local papers, but recreational fishing issues do not seem to warrant any interest from local newspaper editors. Given the ageing population who love the sport of fishing this is neglect of an important readership.

Estuary Perch and Bass in the Gippsland Lakes.

Reader John Scott was walking along the bank of the Mitchell River when he took the attached photograph



of a large number of fish around 15-20cms in length that he identified as either estuary perch or bass. This photo supports other angler's observations of hundreds of these fish in this area. Now we know that these fish if they are estuary perch will journey from the rivers to the saltwater estuary to spawn, and after spawning they will return to the rivers, and this movement may occur between September and December in Victoria. According to that excellent book, "A Guide to the Freshwater fish of Victoria," the male estuary perch becomes

mature at 26cms whilst the female is thought to be mature at around 31cms when they move to the saline estuary occurs.

It is possible these fish were bass, as it is difficult to tell the difference between bass and estuary perch in the water. The bass migrate to the estuaries when they reach maturity and in the case of males, this occurs when the males are 18cms in length and the females are 22cms. This movement to the estuaries occurs from mid June with the return after spawning between August and November. Once in saline water the males congregate in large schools. In the last twelve months 82,000 bass have been stocked in East Gippsland Rivers and impoundments, and this includes the Mitchell River (15,000), Nicholson River (10,000) and Tambo River (10,000) These stockings have been funded from the Recreational Fishing Licences of anglers. Many recreational anglers are concerned that unless the movement of these species are protected recreational anglers will be funding commercial netting of these fish. It is worth remembering that whilst only 40,000 bass have been stocked in the Nicholson River, the intention is to stock 100,000 when the dam in that river is removed and that is an investment by recreational anglers of \$100,000.

On Wednesday 23 May 2012 local member Tim Bull MLA in the Bairnsdale Advertiser stated, "it had been raised with him in the past whether it was worth stocking fish for recreational purposes in a system where commercial netting existed. He added, "my view is that absolutely it is worth it. Any commercial catch rates will be monitored and I would expect some may be caught commercially but this will be recorded for consideration." Mr Bull does not indicate what would happen after consideration and recording of a commercial catch of bass or estuary perch occurred.

The current situation for these species is that commercial catches are already occurring and as these fish reach maturity these catches will grow unless protection is provided to spawning fish at the mouth of rivers. In 2011/12 two tonnes of estuary perch/bass were caught in commercial nets according to 2012 Fisheries Victoria Commercial Fish Production Statistics. (Note the statistics do not distinguish between bass and estuary perch) Based on the 2007/8 commercial value of this species, this catch returned commercial fishermen in excess of \$16,000. Similar catches were taken in 2007/8 and in 2008/9, so 2011/12 is not an isolated catch.

In other words the time for consideration has arrived and recreational anglers should be able to see their investment in stocking species such as bass is protected from commercial nets at the mouth of rivers. It is equally important to recognise the protection for spawning fish, must be for all species moving through the river mouths to spawn.

It is not inconceivable that in the future black bream may also be stocked in the Gippsland Lakes.

A previous Minister responsible for Fisheries, Bob Cameron, released on the 7th April 2004, 26,000 black bream fingerlings in the Gippsland Lakes to provide a photo opportunity and show bream could be stocked in this largest of Victorian estuaries. It is also worth remembering that bream have been successfully stocked in West Australian estuaries since 1995 and let us not forget that 30,000 black bream were successfully spawned from local brood stock in the Bullock Island TAFE facility at Lakes Entrance only a couple of years ago. (see issue 41 December 2010) Recreational anglers expect that their investment in fish stocks will be protected when eventually the commitment to protect spawning fish at the mouth of rivers eventuates.

[The Victorian Recreational Fishing Guide](#) provides a diagram showing the distinguishing features of bass and estuary perch to assist identification.

Source - Information on bass and estuary perch - "A Guide to Freshwater Fishing in Victoria" Cadwallader and Backhouse

The Bemm River Report



This report was prepared by Don Cunningham of Bemm River and is a new addition to this publication. Don has been a resident of Bemm River for over sixty years and an avid angler all his life. His reports will bring an accurate picture of the angling prospects and issues facing the wonderful Bemm River.

"Bream are currently being taken around the edges of the lake now that the lake has risen about a metre, with early morning fishing producing the best bags. I have noticed that some bream are light in condition, which is often the case after spawning however most bream over 38 cms are very lean even though there has been an abundance of prawn. The prawn has proved to be a wonderful bait for bream although I don't think bream catch many live prawn, nothing like the perch or flathead do. In my experience I hardly ever see fresh

prawn in the gut of bream.

Unweighted live prawn fishing the snags will attract the perch, but do not be surprised if your strike turns out to be a bream. There have been sightings of big bream well up stream in the river, and they can be caught on hard body lures. Presenting these lures to bream that you can see requires patience and a very high degree of skill. I have tried a few times and all I have done is scatter the bream and they do not seem to come back.

The fishing platform for bank anglers has been very productive and very convenient with the entrance closed, and the higher water level. Bream and dusky flathead have been landed with some good quality fish weighed in. I have had good reports from the surf, with quality salmon being landed and this is a great option as the weather cools down.

[Dusky flathead are providing anglers with some great action, and can be caught using live prawn or fresh frozen prawn. Just drifting, or casting and slowly retrieving works well. Plastics on a 2 to 4grm jig head will attract plenty of bites as well.](#)

I have been associated with the Bemm River for sixty years, and I have never experienced dusky flathead like the last couple of years. A few years ago we saw baby flathead in thousands and on every sandy bank, and to see them now makes you realise how unique this period has been, but of course two hatches in sixty five years is not very good odds, and these fish are spawning now. Over the years, the Bemm has been known for big flathead, with maybe a dozen a year weighed in. We don't really know, but it could be said as few as thirty big females could have given us this incredible hatch, combined with appropriate water conditions.

We will all remember the abundance of luderick some years ago. We know these fish came into the lake from outside, and provided wonderful sport for about four years. Golden eyed mullet have been absent in numbers for over ten years, and it would seem that lake conditions at Bemm River have changed."

Editor

Thanks to Don for this detailed report. Readers will recall that Don expressed concern in 2013 at some anglers taking over bag limits of dusky flathead and it is to be hoped that is a thing of the past. Don has raised the issue of the lack of knowledge we have on the reasons for the explosion in dusky flathead numbers

at the Bemm in the last couple of years. The lack of almost any research in the area of dusky flathead has been a massive handicap to our understanding of this iconic species. Readers may recall that we have relied on the NSW research of Gray and Barnes into the “Reproduction and growth of dusky flathead in NSW estuaries.” Perhaps in the not too distant future some research in this area might be undertaken in Victoria.

In the last week I had great pleasure in providing written support for a submission for RFL funds made by a Victorian researcher to “undertake a study and collect data on the Fecundity of Female Dusky Flathead in their Victorian Distribution.” That report would cover the area of Mallacoota to the Gippsland Lakes and may provide answers to the question Don has raised, namely why is it that in sixty five years a massive spawning of dusky flathead has only taken place twice, and how can we ensure protection and ongoing annual spawning of the species. It is to be hoped this urgent research is funded.

Gippsland Lakes Dusky Flathead Tracking Project Dec. 2006-June 2008



In 2008 I received the Dr Jeremy Hindell Report from Fisheries Victoria on the movement of dusky flathead in the Gippsland Lakes.

Despite this fish being one of the most sought after recreational species I can find little evidence of any other research on this iconic Gippsland species in the interim, until the proposal in the previous item was put forward.

The Dr Hindell study of 2006-2008 took place in the Gippsland Lakes, however the movement of these fish in the lakes would provide some indication of their movements in other East Gippsland waters. The following is a brief summary of this research project, which I published in Around the Jetties in February 2009 with some additional comments.

“Forty fish were surgically implanted with acoustic transmitters and monitored over eighteen months (December 2006-June 2008). The rate of fish loss in this study was around 25%. In real terms the study suggests that most fish were sedentary and moved little, remaining in single regions of the Gippsland Lakes for extended periods, however fish often moved into the lower and middle reaches of major tributaries (Tambo Nicholson and Mitchell Rivers.) and appeared to reside in these regions for up to a couple of weeks. Larger movements of 30 kms over two to three days were shown but this was not common. During the large 2007 flood some fish moved to more saline waters but no fish were recorded exiting the estuary during the flood. This is the first study mapping the movements of dusky flathead using transmitters.

Statements from the Report

“Lack of knowledge about the basic biology of the dusky flathead severely hampers our ability to understand the consequences of environmental change on reproductive success and or productivity of fish in the Gippsland Lakes.”

And

“Unless we understand where dusky flathead live and breed in relation to the most impacted areas of the Lake system, no amount of recreational fisheries management will ensure a productive and sustainable fishery in the future.”

And

“Properly understanding the basic biology of dusky flathead, including critical habitat, movements and spawning locations are the key to implementing the most appropriate strategies to ensure the sustainability of this important species for recreational fishers throughout eastern Victoria.”

Editor

This report also indicates that there was some movement of fish towards Lakes Entrance around November/December. Hindell suggests this species may spawn in late spring and early summer so that the movement to Lakes Entrance may have occurred “in response to spawning which may occur inside the Lakes in the vicinity of Lakes Entrance.”

Readers may remember a report in this publication headed “Dusky Flathead in the Cunninghame Arm” in Issue 20 December 2008. This article indicated that several readers had caught and released large dusky flathead of between 60-84cms near the footbridge during October/November. A reader indicated the

gathering of large fish had been evident for a number of years in this area and at this time of the years, and the view of these recreational anglers was that these fish were spawning. In that issue I provided details of the professional netting regulations for this arm, and the fact the area could be netted up to December 1st and then it is closed until 30th of April, and the consensus of opinion is that this closure is to avoid conflict between commercial fishermen netting the area and holiday makers.

It is worth noting that the NSW research report "Reproduction and Growth of Dusky Flathead 2008 by Gray and Barnes" referred to in the last newsletter suggests the predominant spawning period for dusky flathead was from September to March and that dusky flathead spawned in the marine dominated lower reaches of estuaries. Both these conditions were met in the Cunnunghame Arm last November and reported upon in this publication and additionally the Bairnsdale Advertiser on several occasions featured photos of large dusky flathead caught in this area between September and March..

Perhaps it is important given the reports of anglers and the suggestion from the tracking project that an attempt should be undertaken to provide some research that would examine spawning areas for dusky flathead in the Gippsland Lakes and suggest appropriate protection if needed.

VRFish Report



The following items are taken from the VRFish February Report and they indicate some exciting moves in the next couple of months that could affect anglers.

1. Port of Hastings- The Victorian government has listed the Port of Hastings for development in the future. Given the importance of Westernport for recreational anglers for any loss of fishing grounds VRFish is seeking access elsewhere and this could include marine parks, boat ramp facilities and recreational fishing areas in Port Phillip Bay or the Gippsland Lakes.

2. Communications with anglers-VRFish has proposed to the DEPI that they would forward an electronic newsletter to 100,000 RFL holders via email. This is an attempt for VRFish to connect with anglers of this state, and simply needs DEPI approval to

provide email addresses of RFL licence holders.

3. Name Change of VRFish-The State Council of VRFish has given general acceptance for the name change to either "Recfish Victoria" or "Recfish Vic." A formal vote on the name change will be taken at the next State Council.

4. Lake Toolondo Water- VRFish is negotiating to protect Lake Toolondo from falling water levels in summer. The DEPI has stocked this lake with 100,000 brown and rainbow trout that are now around 1.5kgs. Should a fish kill occur due to lack of water this would be a significant loss to anglers.

(Editor- Anglers should remember the loss of Murray cod and Golden perch in Lake Mokoan reported on with photographs in this publication. (June 26th 2009)

5. Contribution of Recreational Fishing to the Victorian Economy. VRFish is seeking an RFL large grant to quantify the contribution of recreational fishing to the Victorian economy. A second grant being sought is to undertake a risk assessment of recreational fishing in marine parks, and this project if approved would seek a trial in selected marine parks and sanctuaries.

Editor-The Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Committee has a study is listed and funds allocated (\$50,000) for a study of the economic values associated with fishing in the Gippsland Lakes, however it does not indicate whether the economic value of recreational fishing as compared with commercial fishing will be separately assessed.

6. Corio Bay-VRFish are working to reduce conflict between commercial and recreational anglers in Corio Bay, and it notes that its longstanding policy on banning commercial netting in bays and inlets remains. This issue will continue to be discussed and a working group has been formed with the aim of reducing conflict.

An Invitation to Anglers

Learn More About Estuarine Environments

The East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority invites members of the community to find out more about the estuaries of rivers in East Gippsland at an event to be held at the Nicholson River boat ramp on the 5th April 2014. The first session will commence at 10 am. A repeat session will commence at 1 pm.

This event will include a short presentation about healthy estuaries and the recent works that have been completed by the East Gippsland CMA to improve the lower reaches of our rivers.

There will also be a demonstration of electro fishing techniques using the worlds only electro fishing boat capable of operating in salt water, and an explanation of the methods used for fish stock assessment. The event should be of particular interest to recreational and commercial anglers.

There is no charge for this event. Lunch will be provided for the first 30 participants who register for each session.

You can register by completing the online form on the East Gippsland CMA web site at www.egcma.com.au/Events

Please note this event is subject to weather conditions and river flows.

East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority
574 Main St (PO Box 1012) Bairnsdale 3875
Phone 5152 0600

The Law and Recreational Anglers

Poaching on the Tambo

On the 15th February a man and a woman in their sixties were apprehended fishing the Tambo River and hiding undersize fish they had caught in a plastic bag in bushes close by. When bags were inspected they were found to have 35 black bream almost all were undersize. Fisheries Officers accompanied the two apprehended anglers to their place of residence in Lakes Entrance where a further fifteen fish were discovered, again most undersize and including two King George whiting.

The two anglers will be charged with exceeding the catch limit of black bream (10) and taking and possessing undersize fish.

On each charge they are liable to a fine of fifty-penalty units (\$2,880) or three months imprisonment.



Lakes Entrance Senior Fisheries Officer Bill McCarthy indicated that it was most pleasing that Fisheries were informed of the actions of these anglers through a call on the 13FISH number (13 3474) and responded to this call. The DEPI welcomes reports of suspected illegal fishing and will respond wherever possible and it provides an opportunity for the community and Fisheries Victoria to work together to remove poachers from our streams. It was obvious from the actions of these anglers that they were aware of the regulations and totally disregarded their responsibility as anglers. It is to be hoped that the courts will take this factor into account. Attached is the disturbing photograph of these undersize fish, and I thank Senior Fisheries Officer Bill McCarthy for making this photograph available.

Illegal Equipment Used to Target Rock Lobster



This item taken from a Fisheries Victoria Media Release (15th February) and is published as an interest item indicating problems facing Compliance Officers when illegal methods are used to take Southern Rock Lobster. Spears and snares seem to be the most used illegal methods and several offenders were found over the summer with undersize rock lobster and more than the daily catch limit and also with evidence (puncture wounds) that they were taken using an illegal method.

Fisheries Officer, Ian Westhorpe said penalties for illegally catching rock lobster were severe as “rock lobster is a priority species under the Fisheries Act of 1995 and people can be fined up to \$30,000 or face jail time or both.” Fisheries Officers can seize cars, boats, dive gear and other equipment used, and the attached photo provides an indication of some of the items seized by Fisheries Victoria Officers. Rock lobster may only be taken by hand or in drop nets and “by taking by hand or drop net this acts as a control measure to conserve our valuable stocks.” The bag limit for rock lobster is 2 and a detailed page on the **Collection methods for rock lobster** is included in the Victorian Recreational Fishing Guide.

The Longest Flathead Competition

On the Labour Day weekend March the 8th and 9th The Gippsland Lakes Fishing club ran a flathead competition over the two days in the Gippsland Lakes and Lake Tyers with substantial cash prizes including \$1000 for the longest flathead.

I was interested that the dusky flathead was not specified rather it was simply a **flathead competition**. This meant that the competition was open to either the dusky flathead or a Southern blue spot flathead (yank) to be measured for the longest fish. Whilst there is almost no evidence of blue spot flathead in Lake Tyers some anglers take considerable numbers of this species in the Gippsland Lakes. On this basis I can readily understand why it is a flathead competition.

This raises the issue of recognition of these species and the following is based on work undertaken by research angler John Harrison and reported in **Around the Jetties 51 November 2011**.

The following is a summary of that article and includes research information

Readers of this newsletter would be aware of the excellent work undertaken by research angler John Harrison on identifying the dusky flathead from the Southern Blue Spot (yank) flathead. The need for this approach arose from the fact that anglers found it almost impossible to identify the dusky flathead from the Eastern blue spot flathead.

Senior Fisheries Managers at a Fisheries conference in Bairnsdale in June (2011) agreed that the features identifying dusky flathead and eastern blue spot flathead in the anglers handbook were incorrect. The Australian Museum has taken this matter to a Japanese world authority on flathead at the request of John Harrison. Whilst he defined some variations between the two species of flathead, at the Fisheries meeting it was agreed it would be unrealistic for anglers to apply the “complex criteria used by the Japanese expert to correctly identify the two species.”

Now the dilemma is that we are almost into the next period when Dusky flathead and Southern Blue spot flathead become sought after species in Gippsland waters. (Late October to June) and if the two species, according to the best advice available worldwide, cannot be specifically identified then a problem exists for both anglers and Fisheries Victoria given that the bag limit for dusky flathead is 5 fish with one over 60cms (since changed) whilst the bag limit for Southern blue spot flathead is 20 fish. This problem would seem to make the enforcement of the regulations associated with dusky flathead almost impossible.

John Harrison provided an answer in Issue 48 July/August “Around the Jetties” which is provided again for consideration.

“My personal view is that there should be one set of regulations applying throughout Victoria. Extensive research from NSW indicates that all large dusky flathead are females and that the majority of females do not reach sexual maturity until 56 cm length. Fisheries Victoria also acknowledge that the numbers of breeding age females in Lake Tyers and in Mallacoota Inlet have been reduced to such an extent that they are on the point of impacting on successful breeding and hence fish stock survival. In fact, it is my understanding that an internal fisheries working party has recently been established to identify strategies, which might protect the few remaining breeding females. In the absence of information to the contrary I would have thought that the breeding patterns of yank flathead could be assumed to be similar to those of the dusky flathead and that therefore the same restrictions to protect the breeding yank females should also apply.”

Part of the outcome from the above was the introduction of the **current regulation of a slot size for dusky flathead of 30-55cms** and this was aimed at protecting the large female flathead to provide for successful ongoing breeding. This was introduced with angler support.

I would imagine that most of the fishing effort in this competition would have been targeted on Lake Tyers, given the effect of commercial fishing for flathead with no quotas in the Gippsland Lakes, and with no maximum size limit or catch quota for commercial fishermen. On the other hand, Lake Tyers is a small estuary of just 25sq kilometres with a population of dusky flathead that is being questioned by many anglers. I must say I find it surprising to find a competition that will ultimately be largely based on this small estuary targeting an iconic species that appears to be currently under some pressure. I realize the competition

is for the longest fish and is based on photographs so that fish over the maximum legal size can be returned, however I just have some unease with this competition in the current circumstances.

General Note The dusky flathead grows to 1.8metres in length and 28lbs and the Southern Blue Spot (yank) grow to 90cms and according to the Australian Fish Guide a maximum weight of 8kgs.

Some Observations

Increase in Licence Fees

I had a phone call recently from two readers who have taken Around the Jetties since the first issue in 2007, and they are both two of the most experienced anglers I have met. They wanted to raise with me a concern that they felt was generally held by anglers. They had discussed the possible rise in the cost of a licence and the extension of the licence to cover all anglers. Both these chaps would have been in their eighties, and whilst they didn't oppose the concept of the introduction of a concessional licence, they would strongly oppose this move if the resulting growth of funding was simply used to fund areas that should normally be funded as part of Fisheries Victoria's budget, and they spoke with some feeling of using RFL funds to employ additional Fisheries Officers. In addition they believed many anglers would hold this view, and I think they are right. In other words there would need to be some binding guarantees on how the increased funding would be used and controlled. It is worth remembering the brochure produced by Fisheries Victoria in 1999 when the "All Waters " licence was introduced and which stated "[The all-waters licence is linked to the State Government buy back of commercial fishing licences from Victorian bays and inlets.](#)" This was the case for a time but this clause now seems to have lapsed, and even commercial fishermen requesting the buyback again be placed on the table are unsuccessful.

I would like to hear from anglers and your thoughts on the proposition of requiring all anglers to purchase a licence and increasing the cost of the current licence, remembering when the All-Waters licence was introduced in 1999 it cost \$20 and today fourteen years on the cost of a fishing licence is \$24.50. I realize it is early days and the matter is only being discussed at the Recreational Roundtable Forum, but do remember the Minister has set up a committee to examine the proposal and this committee is meeting now. Your view would be valued.

Bream in the Tambo

I had a strange report from Clive Blackwood who lives close to the Johnsonville Jetty of a very large shoal of black bream numbering somewhere between 500 and 1000 fish of all sizes entering the Tambo River on Friday January 31st, and then moving up the river to the cliffs area three days later. The movement and fish numbers are known because at least four other anglers reported this movement. As often happens several anglers saw these fish slowly moving upstream and despite the fishers best efforts the bream showed no interest in bait or lures. **Clive wondered had other anglers seen such a movement of bream into local rivers..** Again it is natural fish movements such as these that require bream and other species to be protected from commercial nets at the mouth of rivers. In general research shows that bream tend to enter the rivers at the end of autumn but use the lakes over summer so this movement into the river in the last week is a relatively early event. The major movement into the rivers is in early winter and this is associated with the spawning of black bream, and then the fish return to the lakes in the spring.

Source- [Summary of movements by black bream in the Gippsland Lakes \(DPI Resources online\)](#)

Twenty Five Years Ago

Twenty-five years is not a long time, but in that period of time the black bream population of the Gippsland lakes has collapsed. Of course commercial fishermen are hard to convince and a spokesman for the commercial fishermen on the front page of the Bairnsdale Advertiser of August 29th 2008 was quoted as saying regarding bream "*there are literally millions and millions of them. I would see them day after day showing there is little or nothing wrong with the Gippsland lakes system. Anyone who says there are no fish or recruitment is very uninformed.*"

Improved fishing in the Gippsland Lakes **has not** been the experience of recreational anglers and we can only wonder at the millions and millions of black bream seen by this commercial fisherman. Today an angler who catches one or two bream is extremely lucky, and the average angler has difficulty in catching a size black bream. To show the change that has taken place in the black bream catch I provide the weekly fishing report from **South East Coast Tourism for 1989**. This was a detailed report quoting anglers and their catches, which is somewhat different from the shallow Gippsland Newspaper reports of today.

From 25 Years Ago

"10th July 1989- The Nicholson River Fishing Competition was held on the 9/7/89. Twenty-five competitors weighed in 161 fish with a combined weight of 60.98kgs. Jim Crane caught the heaviest bream of

1250grms.”This competition took place in the Nicholson River and the comment is made that “the Nicholson is fishing very well.”

“19th September 1989- Nicholson Angling Club Report- Fourteen members competed in an open waters competition yesterday. They weighed in 229 bream that weighed 82.29kgs. Doug Clarke caught the heaviest bream that weighed 1010grms and Jim Crane caught the heaviest bag which weighed 25.78kgs. The majority of fish were caught in the Mitchell River with a few in the Nicholson.”

‘Fishing Report Week ending 29th August.-The Nicholson River Angling Club versus Knox Boating and Fishing Club on the Sunday. 24 members from Nicholson fished and 25 from Knox fished for a total of 309 bream weighing 122.840kgs. The fishing was done in the Nicholson River only. The heaviest bream was taken by Samara Dunn-1.450kgs.”

Fishing Report for the Week ending 26th June –included “ Eddie Vieth from Doncaster and Jim West from Maidstone fished over two days taking 70 bream at Two Bells on the Mitchell whilst over two days Wayne and Christen Nettleton from Werribee landed 65 bream weighing up to 1.1kgs using prawn in the lower reaches of the river.”

Hundreds of similar reports are available, accurately describing the recreational catches of 25 years ago, and of course every weekend saw angling clubs visiting the area to be part of the black bream fishing bonanza. Today the fishing in the Gippsland Lakes and rivers is a disaster when compared with that of 25 years ago, and we have no plans to restore this fishery, and we still allow commercial netting of the scarce resource that remains.

In 1988/89 the commercial catch of black bream was 206 tonnes whilst today 2009/10 the commercial catch is recorded as 37 tonnes.

What is urgently needed is a detailed study by independent experts, whose task it would be to examine the current situation and provide a plan for the restoration of this states largest and most beautiful estuary with a key plank being the restoration of the black bream fishery of the Gippsland Lakes. The public should be able to provide evidence with open hearings and a published plan to be provided to Government indicating the way forward. The \$10m provided to the non-expert Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Committee could have funded such an inquiry with an outcome that would have provided a positive way forward. Unfortunately programs such as publishing a lakes bird booklet, school based education programs, and community based programs though of some value will not achieve the major change that is needed if ever the lakes are to recover. Today we are in limbo with no real leadership from Government, and the result is an ongoing tragedy.

Special thanks to Geoff Trusler who provided the South East Coast Tourism reports on Fishing in this region for the late 1980’s. This is a wonderful resource that provides a comparison with today.

Writing for Feathers and Fur Magazine

After ten years and eighty issues, two pages per issue of unpaid writing on fishing for the Feathers and Fur Magazine, I have decided to gracefully retire. I commenced writing in 2004 because most shooters are also fishermen, and few magazines provide information on issues relevant to anglers.



In the ten years perhaps the most interesting item that drew the biggest response was the size of the biggest Murray cod taken by an angler. Many anglers recalled gigantic cod they had seen as a boy but had difficulty in putting a weight to the fish.

Perhaps one of the most interesting responses occurred when one reader sent me a tattered photo of a monstrous Groper. Another chap sent me a photograph from a newspaper cutting of a gigantic cod weighing according to the paper 462lbs. The cod was retrieved from the Murray River in 1910, and it was suggested, the cod had been hit by a paddle steamer. The photo was thought to have come from the Benalla Ensign newspaper.

This is a very old photo supplied by a Mr David Evans of Balwyn in 2005

Just for the record the largest recorded and verified cod was a fish of 113.5kg in weight and 1.8 metres in length. Now that’s a big fish from our rivers but stories continue of many much bigger cod being taken.

That Unidentified Jellyfish – (An Update)



Readers of last months Around the Jetties would be aware of the unidentified jellyfish found in the Gippsland Lakes by a commercial fishing friend of Ross Scott local environmentalist and former general manager of the Lake Wellington Rivers Management Authority. The jellyfish was forwarded by Ross preserved in formalin to CSIRO jellyfish expert and research scientist Dr Lisa-ann Gershwin based in Tasmania.

Whilst this story drew not a mention in Bairnsdale papers, it was a front page exclusive in the **Gippsland Times** under the heading **“Stinger Jellyfish Mystery.”** The jellyfish has not been positively identified, and appears new to science, however DNA testing would take place to identify where this species of Jellyfish had originated. Dr Gershwin said that the unidentified species was similar to one from NSW named by Dr Gershwin *Chrisaora wurlerra* in 2008, however one of the key characters for identification was absent. Dr Gershwin added that the CSIRO had not undertaken any studies of jellyfish in the Gippsland lakes in the past and it was not known what impact this jellyfish might have on the Gippsland Lakes. Mr Scott indicated that the large white jellyfish found in massive numbers in the lakes currently is the Moon jellyfish and is quite different to the new species, which has been recognised as a stinging jellyfish. The specimen sent to the CSIRO for identification was captured at Duck Arm some 30 kilometres west of the ocean entrance to the Gippsland Lakes. The mystery of this visitor to the Gippsland lakes remains a mystery, but of more concern is whether this stinging jellyfish is a visitor or is it making its home in the increased salinity of the lake system/

Letters Letters Letters

More Tarwhine Information

John Spirason a local keen bank angler has provided a little more information on Tarwhine.

Hi Lynton

Re Tarwhine. In December 2012 I caught several, probably 10, in a two to three week period off the boardwalk at Metung. They were all in the 15-20 cm range and were caught on prawn.

Regards John

Editor

Thanks John. I would be interested in any further indications of recent catches of Tarwhine.

More on “Finders Keepers “ Item

The following note from Rob Ward follows the item in the last issue of Around the Jetties of the angler finding lures on the bank of Lake Eildon.

Hi Lynton

I loved the story about “finders keepers” A rough dollar estimate of the value of the find would be fun. A metal detector would be an interesting extension of the idea.

I agree with John Bourke, the low level of fishing success on Tyers is worrying (given the general health of the lake in human terms looks good?) I would love to think the fish have just got smarter, but I doubt that is the case.

Cheers Rob

Editor

I contacted the writer of the article Rob refers to, and obtained more details and photos of his remarkable lure discoveries on the banks of Lake Eildon. The total number of lures found was 118, and if one suggested a low average value of \$10 per lure the value of the finds over the last couple of years would



be \$1,180. The first photo covers the entire number of lures and the second photo covers the 30 small-medium stump jump lures. The writer of the article has a permanent caravan in a park at Bonnie Doon and long weekends and holidays are often spent in this area. It is thought that anglers trawling often snag lures on tree branches under the water and with a little time the lures break free and float onto the banks of the lake. The fact that the lake has a substantial rise and fall between summer and winter means many lures are found well up the banks of the lake, and of course it helps to be a chap who enjoys walking along the waters edge with a rod in hand.



This has been a fascinating article that has drawn a number of comments.

Another Report on Lake Tyers

I received this letter from Chris Boyne with a somewhat different take on recent dusky flathead fishing in Lake Tyers.

Hi Lynton,

I am pleased to report that the flathead seem to have come on in recent weeks in Lake Tyers...all the usual feeding areas have produced and I have had no problem in getting my bag of five on the fly rod whilst walking and wading for an hour or two. Big fat fish too with only one small one out of the last seventeen I have landed.

They are very aggressive too and if they miss a fly, a quick cast back over the same area almost always results in another take and hook up. I saw one big fish, 50 odd cms smash something on the surface and he then took the fly when I cast to him. Great fun. I was thinking maybe they were gone but they either walked over the sand from the beach or they were there all along. Lets hope the bream come back on too.

Regards Chris

PS-Years ago I used to catch the odd snapper on fly under the tailor schools- like bream they must be feeding on the scraps left after the carnage. They certainly take the kinks out of the line. Come to think of it I haven't seen the tailor for a while either.

Editor

Thanks Chris for your interesting letter. I have only ever seen a couple of chaps fishing flies on Lake Tyers one of whom was John Pincombe, who several years ago casting from my boat hooked into several good sized tailor in a frenzied feeding school, but was unable to land them. I have often wondered why more anglers are not using flies as dusky flathead would seem to be a great fish to chase with a fly. Actually a few days after receiving your letter I watched a chap off the Lake King side of Metung catch a flathead on a fly. I would be interested to know of other anglers who are using flies for flathead in local waters. Just personally I have seldom tried fishing using salt water flies, as I have always thought Lake Tyers was too weedy to work a fly. I have a friend Andrew Martin of Marlo who catches bream perch and luderick on the fly, and ties a fly representing green weed for luderick. We featured a photo of Andrew some time back with a large sailfish he caught on a fly and released off Northern Australia.

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

