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Around the Jetties

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Issue No 80

An Anglers Newsletter

“Lo the angler. He riseth early in the morning and upsetteth the whole household. Mighty are his preparations. He goeth forth with a great hope in his heart- when the day is far spent he returneth smelling of strong drink, and the truth is not with him.”

From “gone fishin” Nino Culotta (1962)

Editorial



Gippsland recreational anglers can readily see from the VRFish discussion with the owner and operator of the Maasbanker, see page ?, that there is no way that resources will be shared with the hundreds of recreational anglers who come to the ninety mile beaches to surf fish. The Maasbanker will operate from Wilson’s Prom to Marlo, with no respect for the beach anglers, who can expect to see nets operated within 50-60 metres of the beach where they are fishing. This problem has faced recreational anglers for years and will not be resolved by negotiations with an operator who believes the beaches are his domain, and anglers can get out of the way of areas where he wishes to net. This is not sharing a resource and the only way this impasse can be overcome is by

the State Government and Fisheries Victoria taking action to protect the rights of recreational anglers who wish to surf fish along this wonderful coastline. With an election in November, recreational anglers should be seeking a commitment from both parties to resolve this continuing problem by setting up exclusion zones specifically set aside for recreational anglers and where netting is prohibited. It has been suggested that a netting exclusion zone of 10kms either side of the entrance to the Gippsland Lakes would ensure angler access from local beaches, and still provide around 80kms for commercial netting.

Important Late News

Delay on the Introduction of Licence Changes

I received an email 9th May from Ross Winstanley of the RFL Stakeholders Reference Group indicating. “The consultation process for changes to the Recreational Fishing Licence arrangements has been pushed back with a view to implementation on July 1st 2015.”

One can only assume that the Minister decided that now would be an inappropriate time to put forward a major increase in the cost of the Recreational Fishing Licence and the application of the licence to all anglers, given increased charges in the Federal budget for pensioners etc. In Issue 79, Ross Winstanley wrote on the introduction of the licence, “It’s proposed that these changes be in place by mid-year so the time scale will be tight.” It would seem it will be mid year but 2015 and perhaps in that time we will hear what advantages are being negotiated for anglers acceptance of a new licence applied across the board with a State Election being part of the scene.

Thanks to Ross Winstanley for keeping anglers informed, given there has been no media release or information provided by the Minister or Fisheries Victoria on the licence issue.

STOCKING OF ESTUARY PERCH IN LAKE TYERS- A PROGRESS REPORT



Progress is slower than was planned. Telephone interviews have been conducted with those recreational anglers who have caught estuary perch in Lake Tyers and an examination of angling club records and commercial catch records have been completed. A report outlining the relative abundance of perch over the years is currently being compiled and we hope it will contain some recommendations.

When the report is completed, a meeting of interested anglers will be called. The findings of the report will be presented and this meeting will indicate the level of support from recreational anglers for supplementary stocking to re-establish the small remnant stock. This meeting was to have been held some time ago but has had to be delayed because the report has not yet been finalised.

The meeting will now need to be called at short notice and it is unlikely that there will be the opportunity to advise anglers of the time and place by means of this publication. Anglers who have already contributed via the telephone surveys will be contacted individually but anyone else interested in attending should advise me by telephone or email so that I can contact them when the details are available. Once the report and recommendations are completed and the public meeting held, then there are still a number of hurdles that must be crossed. The Translocation Evaluation Panel must give approval, the Vicstock Committee must prioritise the project and RFL funding must be obtained. If these steps can be successfully navigated then there is the practical difficulty of obtaining local brood stock which are genetically pure (not hybrids) and then successfully breeding fingerlings.

If these hurdles can be crossed successfully then we would still hope to meet the timetable by releasing fingerlings in November of this year.

A reminder to contact me if you wish to be advised of the meeting details.

John Harrison

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Thanks to John Harrison for this report and for the work he is undertaking to establish estuary perch again in Lake Tyers

Lake Tyers and Mullet?

I recently had a call from reader Graeme Merryful asking whether I was aware of the reported catch of a mullet in Lake Tyers. Graeme said the fish was an 80cm specimen, and was caught in close proximity to the aboriginal settlement. Graeme heard of this catch from a friend, who had heard of the catch from another angler. Graeme tried to get a photo of the catch from his friend without success.

A day later I received an email from research angler John Harrison with the following message.

"A report today of a mullet being caught in Blackfellows Arm. No confirmed details as yet as to when caught or length." John added the name of the angler credited with this catch; however I could not contact him by phone, so the riddle of mullet in Lake Tyers remains, with no confirmed catch.

But then John added-*"I hooked onto a monster fish a few days ago above Reedy Arm. Chased it in the boat but broke off and lost my favourite lure in the process. Wonder if that could have been the same fish."*

I would appreciate any reader who could add to this story, or who could provide a photo of a mullet taken in Lake Tyers. Of course, mullet have been caught in the Snowy River estuary at Marlo and in the Broddribb River. Some 4-5 years ago, I saw an old Italian chap with a large eel he had caught and was cleaning under the Highway Bridge on the Tambo River. We had a yarn and he talked of his love of eel as a food. I was surprised to see in the Bairnsdale Advertiser a week later a photo of this same fisherman taken on Pettman's Beach and he was holding a 57lb mullet he had caught whilst surf fishing. It is conceivable that with mullet on our beaches some of these fish could have entered Lake Tyers when it was open.

In Dr Mathew Taylor's study "Assessing the potential suitability for Marine Stocking of Victorian Waters" (2010) he wrote describing mullet in Lake Tyers stating, *"Larger mullet have been captured in the estuary, but there are no records of juveniles occurring here. This is not surprising, as mullet traditionally recruit to riverine estuaries as juveniles, and rely on deeper structured habitat"* The "larger mullet" referred to in this study by Dr Taylor have not been confirmed although it is a realistic possibility.



Just a point of interest Dr Taylor suggests in this report that *“Eastern King prawn, estuary perch, mulloway, black bream and dusky flathead are all historically present and targeted by anglers,”* in the Snowy/Broddribb estuary. All this adds to the possibility of large mulloway in Lake Tyers, and yes it would be great to get firm confirmation of this fish in Lake Tyers.

Fishing writer and soft plastic guru Steve Starling has produced soft plastics designed specifically for mulloway, and whilst many have regarded mulloway as nocturnal, (best fished at night) he believes that mulloway can be caught during daylight hours, and he compares them to the saltwater barramundi. In Victoria, the minimum size for barramundi is 60cms with a five fish bag limit. Source- *“A preliminary Assessment of the potential suitability*

of Victorian Waters Selected for Fish Releases.” Dr Mathew D. Taylor (2010)

Could There Be Fish Like This in Lake Tyers?

VRFish Negotiates Exclusion Zone for the

Maasbanker for Four Days!



Late on Thursday 17th April VRFish produced a Media Release on discussions that had taken place with the owner of the commercial fishing vessel the Maasbanker that catches pilchards and salmon off the ninety-mile beach. *“VRFish General Manager, Mr Dallas D’Silva said The agreement negotiated by VRFish is the result of positive discussions with the licence holder and will mean the vessel will not be fishing next to Eastern Beach, Main Beach, Lake Bunga or Lake Tyers Beach from 6am on Good Friday to 6pm on Easter Monday”* The VRFish General Manager indicated that this agreement at this stage **is only for this year.**

The licence holder has agreed that when transiting the Maasbanker will operate at least one mile from the shore so that salmon will not be spooked, however no agreement was reached on the close to shore netting of this commercial vessel. VRFish further stated, *“We are pleased to announce the licence holder has voluntarily agreed not to fish near areas hosting large fishing competitions.”*

Mr Dallas D’Silva concluded the Media release with the statement that *“How we share our fisheries resources with other users is a sensitive and challenging issue.”*

Editor

I congratulate VRFish and in particular General Manager Dallas D’Silva for attempting to negotiate with the licence holder and owner operator of the Maasbanker. This meeting was a result of our raising this matter at a January meeting with the General Manager and Chairman of VRFish, however the result does illustrate the difficulty of recreational anglers getting a fair deal in the sharing of resources. In this case the entire 90-mile beach area from Wilson’s Promontory to Orbest is the preserve of the Maasbanker. Whilst the thousands of recreational anglers coming to this area to enjoy surf fishing have a one off four day zone of around 6 kms available for anglers fishing four beaches **for this year only.** Any sharing of resources ceases to exist, and the Maasbanker can continue to come within 60 metres of shore with its purse seine netting. *The result of this negotiation simply means that if the interests of recreational anglers are to be valued, then the Minister and local member will need to look at the licence that the Maasbanker operates under, and ensure changes are made to protect the interests of anglers who contribute so much to the local economy.*

In Issue 74 of Around the Jetties November 2013 I specifically raised the matter of the actions of the Maasbanker and the need for an exclusion zone to protect the interests of the thousands of recreational anglers who travel to this area with the local member Tim Bull MLA, and I again print the question and his response.

Question to Tim Bull MLA

A continuing concern of anglers is the actions of the Maasbanker netting within 80 meters of the beaches, particularly over holiday periods. The effect of this netting on the food chain should also be a consideration. Would you consider initiating discussion on the development of an exclusion zone of ten kilometres from the entrance to the east and the same to the west? This would surely be acceptable to both the commercial fishermen and provide for the recreational surf fishermen

Response. *I have raised this matter in one of my regular discussions with the Lakes Entrance Fisherman's Cooperative and they have advised that the catch rates of the Maasbanker have not increased over recent years. I am happy for discussion to take place relating to which areas are fished and not fished to see if a consensus can be agreed to between the recreational and commercial sectors.*

It is obvious that the answer misses the point of the question. However, the offer to create a consensus as to which areas are to be fished and the ultimate sharing of the resource would be accepted by recreational anglers who currently seem to have no rights when faced with a large boat netting directly in the area they are fishing. [See editorial.](#)

Netting in The Cunningham Arm Recommences

Like many anglers, I was delighted to see a photo of an angler holding two 1.5kg snapper he had caught in the Cunningham Arm of the Gippsland Lakes recently. Unfortunately, this may be the last such catch as on May 1st commercial netting returned to this small public arm. Of course, the netting may only take place at night and most anglers will be unaware that the arm is netted. There will be no netting on weekends but on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday nights, the arm may be netted between sunset and sunrise on any of these nights, and the commercial fisherman must not use a seine net exceeding 732 metres in length. It is probably fair to say that this water will be denuded of fish and that the tourists who come to Lakes Entrance over the winter months will have little expectation of catching a fish in this arm. Given that many of the winter tourists are elderly, this netting will affect those less able to get to other fishing areas. I put the question of netting in the Cunningham Arm to the local member Tim Bull in the November 2013 issue of Around the Jetties with the following.

Question-There has been strong support in the community and from readers of this newsletter for the removal of commercial netting from the Cunningham Arm of the Gippsland Lakes including recreational anglers and tourist operators. Could you advise whether you support the removal of netting from this water, and if you do what action would you consider taking?

Response- *I have not received any correspondence on this topic from constituents. Although netting is permitted at some times of the year in the Cunningham Arm, I understand that commercial activity is limited to May to November, there has been no commercial activity in this area for some time. I have not formed any view on this matter, as it is something I have not discussed with any stakeholders.*

Editor

Actually, netting in this arm was the subject of a petition last year organised by a local Lakes Entrance angler who was concerned with this issue and it drew a local newspaper response from the Manager of the Fisherman's Cooperative. I understand this petition, although never presented due to technical difficulties with the wording, drew hundreds of signatures including many from tourist operators. Perhaps the way to make such a concern an issue, is to organise letters on the topic to the local member so he may determine the public demand for change, and certainly if Lake Entrance wishes to cater for the elderly winter tourist this is a matter of concern and worth initiating action. This matter was taken up with a Board member of VRFish as well as the General Manager, by the petition organiser however, no action was taken due to circumstances beyond the control of the petition organiser.

Bemm River Fishing Report by Don Cunningham



With the lake open visitors have adapted to the low water levels. Catches have been consistently above average over the autumn, although the weather was cold and windy.

During the Easter break visitors reported good catches of quality bream. Local frozen prawn has proved to be a great bait, and with sand worm now available, anglers have a choice, however the local prawn is still producing the better quality fish.

As I fish my way around the Lake I am reminded of the many different age groups of bream that seem abundant at this time. Recent heavy rain is providing a huge flush of fresh water into the Estuary, and with a large amount of sand at the entrance, high water levels are being experienced.

The beaches were severely battered by huge seas on the weekend of the 2nd of May. Recent reports indicate good-sized salmon can be taken at Pearl Point and the Entrance on the rising tide, and smaller Salmon are prevalent at Ocean Beach. Pippies and Pilchards are the preferred bait. Silver lures are a good option at this time of the year, and provide great sport when schools of salmon come along.

Ramp Problems at the Bemm Again



Sydenham Inlet opened just before Easter, and as expected the condition of the boat ramp has deteriorated. Large gaps between the concrete blocks are showing, (see attached photo) and care needs to be taken when unloading and loading of boats. A recent meeting with East Gippsland Shire indicated that repairs would be carried out soon.

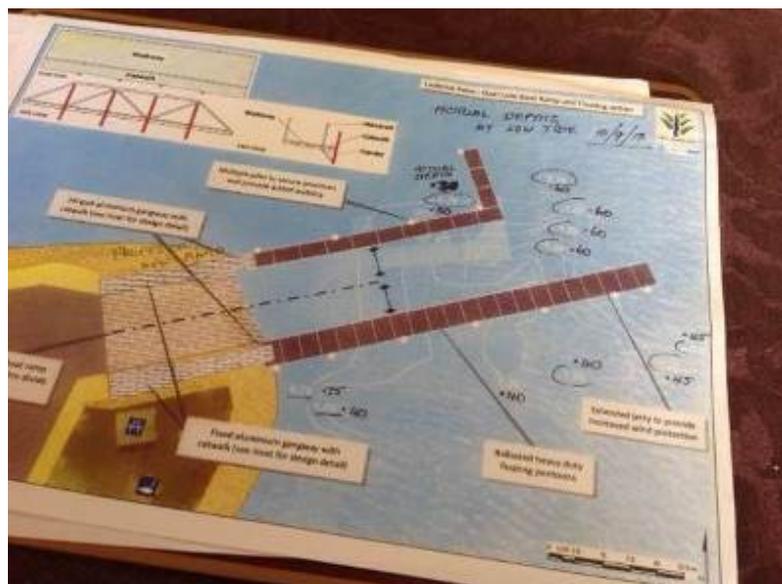
At this meeting, council have finally agreed that the boat ramp area needs to be dredged as a part of the upgrading and renewal of the boat ramp and surrounds.

This project will not be attempted until 2016 / 2017. Anglers will be dismayed at the delay of this project.

However, it does give a window of opportunity for everyone to get involved. Safe boat loading in all winds must be planned for, and is on top of the list of priorities.

Luderick Point is a very exposed area, and safe boat handling could be achieved with a second boat ramp being positioned on the Northern side of the walkway. If positioned back far enough it would shield everyone from the dangerous Easterly winds. Extra parking spaces could be added, which would be most welcome.

This issue, along with many others, will be discussed at a public meeting to be held at the Community Centre on the 28th of May, followed by The Biggest Afternoon Tea for cancer.



Editor

It would seem that if action is not taken to improve the ramp, Bemm River may be without safe launching facilities, and this will affect anglers from all over Victoria who love the iconic Bemm. Readers will remember the furore created in May 2012 by the [Gippsland Lakes Coastal Board](#) when it presented plans that

could have seen the demise of safe launching facilities at Bemm River. It is fortunate that in the 2014/15 State Budget, \$8 million has been set aside for boating infrastructure and both VRFish and the Boating Industry of Victoria are delighted with this commitment to improve boating facilities. Perhaps a great starting point might be the Bemm River facility given the history of recent years and the despair created by the actions of the Coastal Board in 2012. I would hope that the Minister for Local Government, Tim Bull, might look at this situation and provide support for this community, and the recreational angling fraternity of this state, given his excellent support for this remote community in 2012 when the Coastal Board introduced recommendations that could have seen Bemm River without ramp facilities.

Interesting

On the 2nd May I received a letter from Dick Ellis, Chair of the Gippsland Coastal Board thanking me for my submission of 2012. The amazing aspect of this letter is that the Coastal Board is now seeking input to assist in the preparation of a new plan “The Gippsland Regional Coastal Plan.” Given the problems associated with the last attempt at a plan, namely the Boating Plan, I would doubt too many readers would want to write further submissions. I was also concerned that those who wrote submissions never received a copy of the plan but were directed to the Gippsland Coastal Board website, and I wonder what happens to those who provided submissions but do not have a computer.

Thanks to Don Cunningham for his report, including problems associated with the ramp and also for his provision of the photo, which so graphically illustrates the problem. It needs to be remembered that access to the river for recreational anglers has also largely been removed and this is a matter the Statewide Roundtable is to investigate at its June meeting.

Twenty Five Years Ago

Whilst environmental factors have had a role in the decline of the Gippsland Lakes recreational fishery, one also has to ask whether Fisheries Victoria should have been much more proactive in introducing controls to protect a fishery under threat. Little is done today to protect the black bream fishery and no long term plan is available which provides hope for the future.

In 1987 Steve Starling wrote whilst fishing the Tambo River

“The Gippsland Lakes is unquestionably one of the Garden States most significant fisheries resources.”

Steve Starling was writing in the Fishing World magazine of **June 1987 and** said “although the Gippsland Lakes area continues to produce incredible amounts of bream each year, pressure on stocks is always increasing: amateur fishing, commercial fishing and habitat destruction all have their effects.”

He went on to write “one of the most dramatic influences acting upon the long term health of the Gippsland Lakes bream stocks is related to the increased salinity within the system”



Steve Starling concludes this article “watching the number of fish being taken one wonders if a generous daily bag limit of some sort might not be of some benefit even if only from the point of view of reducing the scope for criticism by uninformed or radical conservationists. Surely a bag limit of 30 bream per angler per day wouldn’t offend too many anglers, nor restrict any ones sport or their efforts to stock the freezer.” He also provided the picture of the Johnsonville ramp where “in a little under two hours we witnessed the cleaning of at least 1000 black bream with an average catch per boat of 40 to 100 fish’

The bream fishery at this time was equal to any fishery in this state and attracted anglers from all over the state. **One has to question why the body responsible for the sustainability of this fishery, namely Fisheries Victoria, undertook no action to protect this fishery at this time.**

It is also worth considering that in the same year as the recreational fishery described by Starling (1987) the commercial fishery removed 277 tonnes of black bream from the Gippsland Lakes. It was also at this time that Starling made the observation that the increased salinity forced, “ black bream to seek out rivers, in many cases to run well up them in order to spawn. The concentration of bream in upper reaches of major rivers at spawning time increases their vulnerability to fishing pressures.”

It was obvious that in 1987, bag limits were required to protect fish stocks and with a 24cm size limit small fish that had not spawned were being removed from the system by both recreational anglers and commercial fishermen. Starling identified salinity and the problems of fish moving to the upper reaches of rivers to spawn, and one wonders why those charged with protecting one of this states most valuable fisheries did almost nothing to ensure a sustainable black bream fishery remained for future generations. Today Portland benefits by over \$9 million annually being put into the local economy, from the recreational tuna fishery, whilst the black bream fishery of the Gippsland Lakes is but a shadow of its former self. As Ken Bradly of the Nicholson Angling Club stated, “his club had to include Lake Tyers in its one annual fishing competition each year so that some fish would be weighed in and the proud Nicholson Angling Club after 40 years would not just be a social club due to the lack of fish in the Nicholson River.”

Actions that Could have made a Difference to Recreational Fishing

For many authorities the 30th of June marks the end of the financial or business year, and businesses look back over the past year with accounts and balance sheets. This year in November, a state election will take place and anglers will make a judgement on how their sport has been treated over the past three years. I thought it might be an interesting exercise to look back at some of the items **that could have made 2012/13 a better year for the recreational anglers of this area.**

- 1 Undoubtedly, anglers are concerned at the delay of the Government in providing protection for spawning fish at river mouths entering the Gippsland Lakes. Already this delay has cost in excess of 50 tonnes of spawning black bream taken in nets at the river mouths in the 2011 flood event. This delay may have been responsible for a reduction in the stock of black bream in the Gippsland Lakes. It does seem that the protection of spawning fish may not include Australian bass or estuary perch.
2. In Around the Jetties of March 2012, I reported that a request to local member Tim Bull MLA had been made by some local commercial fishermen for the buyback of commercial licences to be put back on the table. Tim Bull reported, “I have advised the Minister of this and asked that it be considered.” Here we are in May 2014 and no response on this request has been forthcoming. The buyback of any commercial licences would assist in reducing the pressure on fish stocks in the Gippsland Lakes. In the past, recreational anglers have funded this buyback through their licence fees, so it has been cost neutral for the Government. It is very hard to understand this total lack of action to a proposal that would cost the government nothing.
- 3 It has been evident that in recent years the actions of the Maasbanker in netting in close proximity to the local beaches has had an adverse effect on surf fishing and tourism. This matter was raised at the 2012 angler forum in Bairnsdale and even a video has been provided by one of this publications readers, graphically showing the actions of this boat. The request was made for an exclusion zone on either side of the entrance for 10km. This would not stop this boat from taking pilchards and salmon in large tonnages but simply provide a reasonable area for surf fishermen to pursue their sport without competing with a large boat netting in close proximity. This is a matter of an exclusion zone being negotiated by the government to the satisfaction of both the commercial boat and anglers who represent a considerable element of tourists to this area.
4. Netting in the Cunningham Arm has long been a concern of anglers. This narrow arm with its jetties and wharfs has long been a fishing spot for the young and elderly and those who do not have access to a boat. This is realised by the regulation that prohibits netting between November 30th and May 1st, or the holiday season. However, between May and November, commercial fishermen are able to seine net the arm at night with a 730-metre seine net or set a mesh net of 1300 metres. This is the winter period when the elderly come to Lakes Entrance to holiday. With the reduction of commercial fishermen from 32 to 10, it seems more than reasonable that the area available for commercial netting should also be reduced and the Cunningham Arm should have an immediate priority to be netting free.
- 5 The Liberal-National Government introduced the first buyback of commercial fishing licences in the Gippsland Lakes in 1998, and the number of commercial fishermen declined from 32 to 18. On the 29th May 2005, a further buyback was announced by the Labour Government of the day and eight licence holders took advantage of this announcement leaving 10 active commercial licences working the Gippsland Lakes. Despite the decline in the number of commercial licences, there has been no corresponding decline in the areas available for commercial netting. It would seem reasonable that areas

of the Gippsland lakes should now be declared **recreational fishing only** and a reduction in the area available for commercial netting should be negotiated. Areas such as **the Barrier, Cunningham Arm, Jones Bay with the cut, and Bancroft Bay** come to mind as areas that should now be protected from commercial netting. This would increase access of recreational angling to fishing grounds formerly regularly netted.

- 6 The 2002 paper, “The effects of haul seining in Victorian Bays and Inlets” (See issue 68), would seem to suggest that survival experiments on fish captured in haul seines, including flathead, had a 90% survival rate. It also suggested, “the low level of wastage is a positive feature of the fishery that is probably an important contributor to the overall sustainability of the fishery.” Given this study undertaken by Fisheries Victoria, there would seem little reason for the non-application of the recent dusky flathead regulations to commercial fishermen who may currently take the breeding female dusky flathead over 55cms in the Gippsland Lakes. This may provide a level of support to the dusky flathead population of the Gippsland Lakes.

The introduction of these six actions to support recreational fishing in the Gippsland Lakes would give an enormous boost to recreational angler confidence and would provide a boost to tourism and with it local economies. Above all, these steps in the main involve a change in regulations by Government and with almost no cost to the Government of the day, could be introduced. All that is required is initiative and drive, and a realisation of the importance of recreational fishing to this area of East Gippsland. It would be hard to understand why any Government would not grasp this opportunity.

I was interested that VRFish in a recent media release applauding the \$8 million allocated to recreational boating infrastructure stated, “Recreational fishing contributes more than \$2.3 billion to the Victorian economy each year.” It would be my belief that this contribution has a considerable impact on rural areas. The Government provides funding of over \$50 million each year to the Grand Prix, and \$4 million per annum through the Recreational Fishing Initiative to recreational fishing. **There does not seem to be a realisation by Governments of the massive contribution of recreational fishing to the economy of this state.**

A View of the Black Bream Problem in the Gippsland Lakes from the Past.

The late Peter Spehrs wrote the following item, after the **2008 draft of Fisheries Regulations** had been published. In this draft it was recommended that **the minimum size limit for black bream be confirmed at 28cms and the recreational bag limit be reduced to five fish.** Peter wrote-

“A commercial catch greater than 200 tonnes per annum was made from 1981-91 and this has dropped to an average of 31.75 tonnes per annum over the last four years.

The status of the fishery is under a cloud and until there is sustained and substantial evidence that the bream fishery is recovering we must apply ourselves to conservative harvesting regulations. After all, a personal bag of five bream in excess of 28cms is more than adequate to meet the “immediate personal needs” of an average family.



I believe that recreational anglers will embrace this change and give a clear message they care about our bream stocks. The commercial sector needs to show a similar acceptance of the changes such as limiting areas open to commercial netting and applying realistic black bream harvest quotas. Netting restrictions should be applied to a kilometre from river mouths, with the barrier, the area around Metung and all Cunningham Arm totally restricted from netting.

Fisheries Victoria withdrew the five fish bag limit suggested in the 2008 draft of the final regulations. Many local anglers regarded this back down as a great disappointment, whilst in Peter Spehrs words “unfortunately our policy makers went “weak at the knees” despite initially proposing a 5 bream per day limit.

Editor

Peter Spehrs was a great angler who was also known for his tagging and releasing of almost 6,000 fish in Lake Tyers and Mallacoota, mainly black bream and dusky flathead. His writing, advice and vision were based on this experience. He wrote for this newsletter under the pseudonym of the “Concerned Angler.”

In this short article [he recommended a kilometre exclusion zone for commercial netting at the mouth of rivers well before protection of spawning fish became a government commitment](#), a recreational bag limit of 5 black bream per person per day and a 3-month closed season for spawning black bream. He also suggested catch quotas for commercial fishermen and limitations on areas they could net. It should be remembered that this was written almost seven years ago, and yet if these suggestions had been introduced then, today we might be taking the first tentative steps towards a black bream recovery. At the very least these options should be reconsidered by all associated with fishing in the Gippsland Lakes and tributaries. The photo above supplied by John Scott, Bairnsdale Angler, Mitchell River Bream 2013

A problem ignored

Identification of Dusky Flathead This item appeared in [Around the Jetties November 2011](#)

Dusky flathead anglers would be aware of the problem of identification of dusky flathead and the Eastern blue spot flathead, and the work undertaken by research angler John Harrison on this issue. The following appeared in Issue 51 November 2011 of [Around the Jetties](#). -

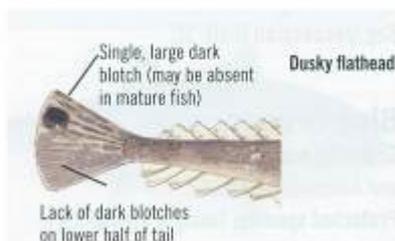
“The Australian Museum has taken this matter to a Japanese world authority on flathead at the request of John Harrison. Whilst he defined some variations between the two species of flathead, at the Fisheries meeting it was agreed it would be [unrealistic for anglers to apply the “complex criteria used by the Japanese expert to correctly identify the two species.”](#)”

Now the dilemma is that after almost three years we are no closer to solving the problem of identification of Dusky flathead and Southern Blue spot flathead, both sought after species in the Gippsland Lakes. 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 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.

[The resolution to this dilemma was believed by many anglers to involve placing the dusky flathead bag and size limit on all estuarine flathead caught in estuaries from the Gippsland Lakes to the NSW border. It was felt this would make enforcement possible whilst at the same time protecting dusky flathead from being identified as Southern blue spot”](#)

Editor

This problem identified initially by Lake Tyers research angler John Harrison several years ago, was obviously placed in the “too hard” basket and nothing has been heard from Fisheries Victoria, regarding identifying the dusky flathead from the Southern blue spot or yank flathead.



On the left is a photo of a dusky flathead tail with numerous blotches whilst on the right, from the 2014 Fishing Guide, is the identification guideline .

The actual photograph and the diagram have little in common and could confuse angler identification.

If the world’s best authority on flathead suggests that the dusky and blue spot flathead can only be identified by the application of [“complex criteria”](#), then the average angler has little hope.

This problem would be simply overcome by applying the dusky flathead maximum and minimum size rules to [all flathead](#) in waters from the Gippsland Lakes to the NSW border. I imagine if this is not done then at some time an angler will have over the bag limit of five dusky flathead in the Gippsland Lakes, believing they were Southern blue spot flathead with a 20 fish bag limit.

I wonder if a successful prosecution could be achieved given the difficulties of identifying the two species. The solution appears relatively simple and could be achieved with a Fisheries Notice.

I can provide a copy of John Harrison's paper on the "Identification of the Dusky and Southern blue spot flathead" to any interested angler or club upon request.

Drawing the Line

On the 30th of April I attended a film screened by SEFTIA (The South East Trawl Fishing Industry Association) and the Lakes Entrance Fishermen's Cooperative for the public. This was an excellent film examining many aspects of the offshore fishery industry, and in particular looking at the problem posed by having 40% of Australia's offshore waters protected by Marine Parks. The relatively small marine protected areas in Queensland have cost over \$300 million to introduce under the previous Government and only a further \$100 million has been allocated to buy out offshore fishermen who will be removed in the roll out of parks. Despite the offshore fishing industry being a leader in World's best practice, a vast area of coastal Australia has been removed from the fishery as a result of marine parks and this was despite Australia importing 70% of the seafood used in this country.

The film acknowledged that the World's seas were under threat from overfishing, however a number of prestigious academics spoke on the film stating this was not the case in Australia, where scientific quotas protect the fish, and they argued that marine parks are not the only solution to ensuring a sustainable and renewable fishery. It was pointed out that as a result of the massive marine park off the Queensland coast Australia catches only 15,000 tons of tuna whilst Papua-New Guinea catches a million tons per annum of the same stock of fish.

The comment was made that the establishment of marine parks was more a political decision rather than an environmental protection. It was suggested we are importing \$2 billion of seafood from poor third world countries, and the morality of this should be considered when we have an ability to provide that seafood ourselves, whilst at the same time having a sustainable and renewable resource with the current controls and quotas that apply to the Australian industry. The Australian seafood industry is regarded as the most scientifically managed fishery in the world, and many believe marine parks achieve nothing when compared with the controlled offshore fishery. The lack of consultation with fishermen, and the fact that the introduction in 2012 of the world's largest marine reserve put many fishing families at risk was a sad outcome of the previous Government's action and in the film the effect of this action provides a moving commentary as some fishing families face a bleak future.

The film concluded with a strong case being presented for the use of the Margiris, the super fish factory that was banned by the Government in 2012. The case presented relied on the fact that it would only have caught a scientifically determined quota, and there would have been no wastage because all the fish caught are processed at sea, and the Government could have provided an on board observer to all its fishing activities which were to be subject to filming including within the net. Again a decision with little consultation and less understanding.

Drawing the Line was funded by a northern Australian fisherman, and raised many questions including the power of small groups to influence policy regardless of the effects on the Australian community. This is a film that should be seen generally as the decisions taken by Government have influenced the ability of Australians to access seafood whilst ensuring we continue to have a sustainable offshore fishery into the future. Thanks to SEFTIA for making this film available to the public in Lakes Entrance.

Editor-The above report was included in the May issue of the SEFTIA magazine.

Please Note

I would also make the comment that I would see almost no relationship between the controlled offshore fishery and its scientifically determined quotas and the Gippsland Lakes commercial fishery with its lack of quotas and its ability to target spawning black bream and large female flathead both of which are regarded by many as species under threat. A scientific basis for commercial fishing in the Gippsland Lakes is urgently needed.

Statewide Recreational Fishing Roundtable Forum

I am pleased to report a summary of the report of the meeting held **on March 14th** is now available to anglers on the Internet. The following is a summary of some of the issues discussed.

More on the Licence Change

Regarding the introduction of changes to the recreational fishing licence, the report states that the Minister has indicated that the Regulatory Impact Statement on changes to the Recreational Fishing Licence will be circulated to the public in three to four weeks. Given this was reported on the 14th March anglers should expect this statement to be made public in the immediate future.

(This document will set out changes to the licence, and actions to which the additional funds will be applied. Remember the current licence yields around \$6 million and the new licence is expected to yield near \$12 million. Anglers will have a chance to comment on the changes and I hope all anglers and clubs will make their thoughts known. Going on past experience, it may be a decade before you have this chance for input.)

Murray Cod Regulation Changes

The process to change Murray cod slot limits is underway, and community consultation has taken place. Further meetings are to take place and a proposal put to the Government and then a Fisheries Notice will introduce changes. (No indication of the proposed changes was included in this summary.)

Fish Stocking Evaluation

Over the last three years Fisheries Victoria have stocked over 2 million marked native fish in water such as Lake Eildon, Campaspe River, Goulbourn River, Loddon River etc. The study will determine how stocked fish contribute to the wildfish populations, and what level of breeding takes place and how cost effective has the stocking been.

Stocking of Estuary Perch

In 2013 FV stocked 107,000 estuary perch in seven different waters most of which were lakes in the Western District. Previously stocked estuary perch in Lake Bolac are now approaching 25cms, however the level of predation on this stocking is not known.

(Readers will be aware that the Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club has been undertaking research at the request of Fisheries Victoria, in an attempt to return estuary perch to Lake Tyers, a water that formerly held numbers of this species. It does seem a little strange that lakes in the Western District and waters such as the Albert Park Lake receive estuary perch fingerlings, yet a long process confronts the attempt to stock an estuary that once had numbers of this species.)

North East Trout Stream Survey

Fisheries Victoria commissioned the Arthur Rylah Institute to assess trout populations in 13 sites in the King, Howqua, Jamieson, and Goulbourn Rivers. The results showed very few fish in the lower reaches that supported angler feedback, with an increase in abundance in the higher reaches of the rivers. The results are being studied and recommendations will follow.

(A similar concern of the lack of trout in Gippsland streams was made known to VRFish. Local NE member Bill Sykes MLA played an important role in initiating the NE study.)

Bemm River

Don

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and

the

Ellis



Above, Independent Member for Gippsland East Craig Ingram and Minister for Fisheries, Candy Broad, officially launch the facility last week.

It is

surprising that the parlous state of recreational angling in the Gippsland Lakes has not been an issue raised at the Roundtable, but then we have only had access to summaries of meetings since September 2013. Since 2013 hardly any comment on the problems facing the East Gippsland recreational fisheries has been made apart from the Metropolitan Associations attempt to regain access to the Bemm River.

ODD Bits and More

An Opportunity Lost

Recently I was going through some newspaper cuttings and came across an article headed “**Research Facility is all Systems Go,**” in the Lakes Post of April 18th 2001 which indicated a marine research centre on Bullock Island was being opened by the then Minister Candy Broad supported by local member Craig Ingram.

Ellis of the Metropolitan Anglers Association requested Fisheries Victoria commence negotiations with the landholder who removed access who removed access to Bemm River in an attempt to restore access to the river. Brian Mottram of Fisheries Victoria to follow this up investigate possible actions/improvements.

(Anglers were asked to support this important move in last Around the Jetties by providing information to Don whilst noting the latest report of deterioration of the ramp)

General Comment

surprising that the parlous state of recreational angling

The facility provided for 36 2000-litre tanks and it was hoped that the centre would provide research into black bream sustainability and look at the contaminants that impact on this resource such as mercury, as well as providing information on aquaculture. RMIT and TAFE were in partnership with this project.

The long-term results of this research centre have hardly been significant, and the facility is falling into disrepair and may never be capable of being brought back into operation, meanwhile hundreds of thousands of dollars are being spent by the Government purchasing marine fingerlings from Narooma in NSW. Thousands of bass were successfully bred on two occasions in this facility, but due to water faults the fingerlings died and on the second attempt both fingerlings and brood stock were lost died **and the project was quietly dropped. (The funding for this project included Fisheries Victoria, Catchment Management Authorities and some other unnamed sources)** The only association with black bream was a TAFE black bream spawning class that over a couple of weeks using Gippsland Lakes brood fish spawned 30,000 black bream fingerlings. A most successful project however it is not likely to be repeated given these fish rather than being released were euthenised due to an agreement between TAFE and Fisheries Victoria that they would not be released back into the Gippsland Lakes. This publication was the only magazine to comment on either of these disasters. Regarding contaminants affecting black bream, it is doubtful that any research was undertaken using this facility.

Changes in our Rivers

A couple of weeks ago Ken Bradley of the Nicholson Angling Club spoke of reports of stingrays in the Nicholson River. John Scott a local angler whilst walking his dog along the edge of the Mitchell River on the morning of the 13th May was amazed to see a large stingray just below the Highway bridge. Put these observations together with the recent catch of stinging jellyfish, in the Gippsland Lakes (yet to be identified) the European Shore crab invasion and it would seem that we have definitive proof our lakes are becoming more saline. This will be an added threat to any long-term recovery in the stock of black bream in the Gippsland Lakes.

“The combination of decreased inflows and the permanent entrance to the sea has resulted in increased salinity throughout the Lake system. The future state of the system with climate change and in addition continued water extraction is likely to be predominantly marine.”

This statement comes from a study “Understanding the water requirements of the Gippsland Lakes” by Tilleard J W, O’Connor N and Boon PI, 2009. Added to this, evidence exists of increased depth of the entrance and decreased inflows from the rivers and we have a rapidly changing lake and river system largely as a result of the actions of man.

North Eastern Trout Inquiry

Following the recent North Eastern survey of trout streams a meeting of 70 anglers and community representatives took place in Mansfield. At this meeting it was suggested that unusually warm summer temperatures and low river flows might explain the lack of trout in the lower reaches of rivers. Fisheries Victoria are developing a research and monitoring program to understand better how these wild trout fisheries are performing. This plan will focus on tributaries to Lake Eildon. The matter of East Gippsland rivers was raised with the Chairman and General Manager of VRFish given reports of poor trout fishing in Gippsland Rivers. VRFish General Manager Dallas D’Silva has informed me that the DEPI is keen to hear from Gippsland anglers on how their local fisheries are performing, so its **now over to anglers and clubs** to provide this information to Fisheries Victoria and perhaps in the future there may be an assessment of the condition of Gippsland Trout streams. Contact should be made with Anthony Foster by Mail at DEPI or by email to Anthony.Foster@depi.vic.gov.au. If you or your club forwards a comment please send a copy to Dallas D’Silva at VRFish

Wish List for Coming State Election

In a communication from VRFish, I noted that VRFish has been developing a “Wish List” to take to political parties prior to the 2014 November election. I queried who was developing this wish list and was informed by the General Manager of VRFish that the Board and State Council of this body had been developing this list over two years. I am concerned that angling clubs and anglers across the state have not been invited, over this period, to participate in developing this wish list nor has this publication, with over 1000 recreational angler readers, been invited to submit items for this wish list. As far as East Gippsland is concerned the removal of commercial netting from the Gippsland Lakes and the preparation of a scientific report of the actions necessary to restore the Gippsland Lakes for future generations are two items that would seem to be important to anglers in the East of the state, however there are many other areas of concern.

I invite anglers to send me items for a local wish list, and these will be put to the parties and candidates prior to the election. This is not new and readers will recall a similar approach by this publication was taken

in 2011. **It is now up to anglers to provide those questions**, and hopefully we may get the candidates to provide some answers and publish them for our readers.

Around the Jetties on Line can now be sourced on the Lake Tyers website-
www.laketyersbeach.net.au

The newsletter will still be emailed to readers and those who do not have access to email facilities will still receive hard copies. **Readers-** 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

13