



Around the Jetties

November 2014

Issue No 84

An Anglers Newsletter

“Left to his own natural instincts and his common sense, any man of reasonable intelligence and sensibility is likely to favour bottom fishing above all other forms.”

Louis D. Rubin Jr.

“The Even Tempered Angler” (1983)

Editorial



This item was taken from Around the Jetties
(Issue 51 of November 2011)

*“A commitment of the Coalition Government prior to the election was **“working with recreational and commercial fishers to implement measures to protect spawning fish stocks at river mouths.”** No information has been provided as to how or when this commitment will be undertaken. Currently black bream are in the rivers of the Gippsland Lakes to spawn having entered the rivers through the nets set 400 metres from the river mouths and in areas like The Cut on the Mitchell, which provides another entry into the Mitchell River. (This would hopefully be included in any discussion on the protection of spawning fish.)*

It will be interesting to see Fisheries Victoria working with the commercial fishers and recreational anglers to come up with a workable scheme to implement this commitment, given that the commercial fishers have boycotted any meeting with recreational anglers at any Fisheries Victoria Gippsland Lakes Fisheries Assessment days, and that has been the situation for the last five years”

TODAY As far as I am aware, no meetings have taken place in the last three years on this issue, and with only seven weeks to go until the election, it would seem that this commitment or pledge of the Napthine Government to recreational anglers in East Gippsland is just a broken commitment. Sadly,

our local member has made no public comment on this commitment despite being aware of just how important it is to recreational anglers and the future of black bream in the Gippsland Lakes.

A Disaster for the Gippsland Lakes

Collapse of Dusky Flathead Numbers in the Gippsland Lakes

Figures that have just been released by Fisheries of Commercial Production in Victoria for the 2012/13 year show a dramatic collapse of the Dusky Flathead population in the Gippsland Lakes that should be of concern to both anglers and Fisheries Victoria.



For a considerable time anglers have indicated that, catches of dusky flathead had deteriorated, and this was evident over the Christmas period when visitors seldom landed a dusky flathead. Up until 2006/7 years angler catches were quite good and many anglers even waded into the shallows of Lake King off Metung, casting plastics with good results, whilst anglers boating the area would often achieve their bag of five fish. At

this time, the commercial catch was around 45 tonnes per annum. The released catch statistics show that since 2005/6 the commercial catch of dusky flathead has shown a continued decline until in 2011/12 the commercial catch was a small 23 tonnes.

Then in 2012/13, a dramatic decline to a mere 8 tonnes took place. It is little wonder that the anecdotal information of recreational anglers on the lack of dusky flathead in the Gippsland Lakes proved so accurate. However, it is surprising that the responsible authorities such as Fisheries Victoria were not aware of the decline of this important species. If the same decline occurred in 2013/14, it could mean one of the most sought after recreational species would be at long-term risk in this states largest estuary.

Reasons for this Decline.

I put forward the following as possible reasons for the decline in dusky flathead numbers since 2005/6. This has been a steady decline that all anglers who fish the Gippsland Lakes have been aware. In 2011/12, I had four mornings fishing the Gippsland Lakes off Shaving Point and Nungurner using live mullet, for a return of one dusky flathead of 38cms. I, like many others, fished Lake Tyers in the months that followed.

1. In March 2012, recreational anglers met at Lakes Entrance and Mallacoota and endorsed a recommendation to Fisheries Victoria that the minimum flathead size should be increased from 27 to 30 centimetres. At the same time they endorsed a recommendation that the maximum size should be reduced to 55cms. This recommendation had unanimous support of anglers as it was designed to protect the large spawning female flathead over 55cms. The bag limit of five fish was maintained.

Unfortunately, Fisheries Victoria did not apply this protection for spawning dusky flathead to commercial fishermen who could take all fish over 55cms. This would almost certainly have a long-term effect on the survival of this species in the Gippsland Lakes.

2. Despite sound evidence of declining dusky flathead numbers, and the acceptance by recreational anglers of a bag limit of five fish, commercial netters were allowed to take all the flathead they could

catch with no catch limits being applied. Many recreational anglers have felt that the steps they were accepting to protect this important species were being **nullified** by the total lack of catch limits applied to commercial fishermen.

3. Added to the above has been the high market prices for flathead, and this meant greater fishing effort from the commercial fishermen for dusky flathead

Unless this matter is urgently addressed by Fisheries Victoria, one of this State's most important dusky flathead fisheries will be largely destroyed. The recreational anglers have done all that's possible to maintain and support this fishery, whilst no evident support has come from that very small commercial sector to protect this important species, and representatives of the commercial sector have refused to meet with recreational anglers since 2005 to discuss any issues associated with Gippsland Lakes Fishery.

Another aspect of an effect of this decline will be **added fishing pressure on that small estuary, Lake Tyers 25sq kms as compared with the Gippsland Lakes 400sq kms.** Interestingly dusky flathead are still caught in Lake Tyers and are probably the most sought after fish in that water; however, it is also true that no longer do commercial fishermen net this estuary with no concern for the future of the fishery. (Lake Tyers was closed to commercial fishing in 2003.)

****Anecdotal information from anglers in the 2012/13 season indicated some concern at the stock of dusky flathead in Lake Tyers. This is to be expected given the ever-increasing pressure on this small estuary and the decline in the Gippsland Lakes Fishery.**

Lake Tyers Flathead caught early October 2014. Photos courtesy of John Pincombe from Mansfield

Research on Dusky Flathead

This newsletter announced a research project on dusky flathead (Issue 82) to be undertaken by Tara Hicks examining the effectiveness of recreational size limits and importantly the long-term sustainability of dusky flathead fisheries. The study will be based on the Gippsland Lakes, Mallacoota Inlet, Lake Tyers and Sydenham Inlet. This study supervised by Charles Stuart University (Albury) assumes added significance and importance given the current statistics on dusky flathead in the Gippsland Lakes. Recreational anglers may be requested to assist this study later.

I have brought the issue of the dusky flathead collapse in the Gippsland Lakes to the attention of Dallas D'Silva, General Manager VRFish, who has indicated that when he spoke to the DEPI "they were comfortable with the state of the dusky flathead stocks." A DEPI Report from 2013 stated "Changes in the catch rates of dusky flathead are thought to reflect changing environmental conditions, which influence spawning and the reproductive process, though little is known about the environmental and habitat drivers of reproductive success in this system."

Editor- I find it difficult to comprehend that changes in environmental conditions in the DEPI 2013 Report are blamed for influencing spawning rates yet this is followed with the statement that "little is known about the environment and habitat drivers of reproductive success." It needs to be noted that the decline in dusky flathead numbers in the Gippsland Lakes dates from 2005/6 when the catch was 48 tonnes per annum to a mere 8 tonnes in 2012/13. The effect of this decline on the small Lake Tyers fishery needs urgent consideration as it could result in two major dusky flathead fisheries in trouble.

Black Bream in the Gippsland Lakes



This same Commercial Fish Production Report indicates that 81 tonnes of black bream were taken in 2012/13 which is almost double the annual average apart from flood years, **and 2011/12 was one of those flood years.**

The average catch for the last ten years excluding flood years **was 38.6 tonnes per annum**. This in reality means around 50 tonnes of spawning bream were taken at the mouth of the rivers as they left the rivers with their inflow of fresh water. Of course, this slaughter could have been avoided had the current government met their 2011 **commitment to protect spawning fish at the mouth of rivers from commercial nets**. The lack of action continues to put the future of black bream in the Gippsland lakes at risk.

Total Catch of all species 2012/13

The total catch of all species for 2012/13 was 186 tonnes excluding 29 tonnes of carp. This is one of the lowest total catches of fish from the Gippsland Lakes on record, and indicates that the commercial fishery should be examined as to whether this is the best use of this scarce resource. It again raises the issue of the long-term effects of the commercial fishery removing the spawning fish on their move into the rivers to spawn. This may be the greatest reason for the long-term decline of black bream. It also brings into harsh reality **the lack of government understanding of the black bream fishery with its total lack of commitment to protect spawning fish at the mouth of rivers from commercial nets**.

My thanks To Fisheries Victoria for making this Commercial Fish Production Bulletin for 2012/13 available. This bulletin provides one of the most important tools to understand the current state of our fisheries, and this is particularly so in waters such as the Gippsland Lakes where the main recreational species are under severe threat.

Black bream in the market

Ross Winstanley former Fisheries Manager in Fisheries Victoria contributed the following. Currently he represents recreational anglers on the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security Advisory Committee- Ross writes referring to a recent item in Around the Jetties.



“Your reported Box Hill market observations of black bream selling for the equivalent of around \$50/kg as whole fish are very interesting. The same could be seen at the Prahran market and other suburban markets around Melbourne. This demonstrates two things:

- That there is a market demand by consumers who'd rather pay top dollar for small whole bream rather than a lower price for locally trawled or imported fish in boneless fillet form; and*
- That this demand occurs at the household level rather than the restaurant and hotel level, which is mainly supplied directly by seafood wholesalers and distributors.*

Combined with our experience with species of similar popularity, what this tells us is that, if the sole national commercial source of black bream - the Gippsland Lakes - was closed to commercial fishing tomorrow, the already-troublesome level of illegal fishing for bream would proliferate. Some sections of the community have a particular preference for bream (hence the price) and illegal netting has been a significant and recurrent problem in the Werribee River, Paterson River and elsewhere. On its own, the popularity of bream as a marketed species is no justification for continued commercial fishing in the Lakes but it does demonstrate that there are more stakeholders in future policy decisions about the fishery than anglers, commercial fishermen and the tourism industry.’

Editor

I would think that the closure of commercial fishing in the Gippsland Lakes would not add greatly to the level of illegal fishing. Whilst it might be a significant problem on the Werribee and Patterson Rivers, there is little indication of increased prosecutions for illegal fishing on the East Gippsland Rivers.

Of course, it could be argued that the recreational angler contribution of \$2 million from licence fees to employ Fisheries Officers is providing a contribution to overcome illegal fishing in the rivers of East Gippsland. It was significant that the few black bream on display in the Box Hill Market were not given a prominent display and were rather a group of half a dozen fish in a corner almost covered with ice.

It is worth remembering that in the early 80's over 400 tonnes of black bream were caught and marketed by around 50 commercial fishermen. Today 10 commercial fishermen's average catch total about 35 tonnes per annum, with many of these fish caught at the mouth of rivers as they attempt to enter these tributaries to spawn. Sadly, the Gippsland lakes system is the only area where netting for black bream continues to be permitted, and this marvellous estuary is showing the results of unfettered commercial netting of key recreational species.

An Amazing Project to Save Port Phillip Bays Shellfish Reefs

Over a century of commercial dredging in Port Phillip Bay has ruined much of the shallow fringing shellfish reefs, and this started with the oyster harvesting in the mid 1880's followed by the post 1963 mussel and scallop dredging that further denuded these reefs. Oysters once flourished in the bay, however according to Paul Hamer Senior Research Scientist at Fisheries Victoria, that population were lost one hundred years ago.

But that is about to change according to Ross Winstanley as *“Victoria has all of the necessary ingredients for re-establishing broad areas of natural and self sustaining beds of oysters and mussels and all the associated marine life. Enterprising members of the Albert Park Yachting and Angling Club have teamed up with researchers from Fisheries Victoria and Melbourne University to develop a staged approach to bring this about.”*

With the cessation of dredging in Port Phillip Bay, the snapper fishing has greatly improved, but it is believed this fishery can improve even more with the restoration of shellfish reefs. This has been the vision of the members of the Albert Park Yacht Club many of whom could recall the reefs prior to the dredging of the bay. Today, Fisheries Victoria, and the Albert Park Yacht Club have joined forces with the Nature Conservancy for the pilot projects to restore reefs at Geelong, Hobsons Bay and Chelsea in approximately 8-10 metres of water.



The aim is to build new reefs that will in turn boost fish numbers, create cleaner water, and increase recreational fishing opportunities. This is regarded as a most important project as in Southern Australia most reefs have been lost, and it was hoped if this project was successful other estuaries might also consider reef re-establishment.

Some Bay mussel farmers have already seized on the opportunity to farm Angasi oysters sourced from the Queenscliff hatchery. This species of oyster is native to the bay. This pilot project will run for three years.

In recent years, research has shown that investments in habitat can be recouped within three years of the environmental restoration through increased fisheries productivity. The author of this study stated, “This is not surprising when it is recognised that our estuaries are our most productive ecosystems.”

Hopefully at some time in the future, this type of vision will apply to the Gippsland Lakes and its value to this state will be recognised

James Fitzsimons Director of Conservation at the Nature Conservancy said, “In Southern Australia we’ve lost all of them (shellfish reefs) so this is a really important project,” and

Bob Pearce former Chairman of VRFish and currently the Albert Park Angling Committee Chairman stated, “It is not about getting more fish, it’s about all the other benefits that come with having healthy shallow reefs.”

The Nature Conservancy, a global conservation organisation will contribute \$150,000 and considerable international reef restoration expertise. The State Governments Recreational Fishing Initiative will contribute \$120,000. The pilot stage will enable researchers to assess the survival, growth and biodiversity of the developing reef.

This project is not without threats such as Bonamia, an oyster disease, and predators such as the Northern Pacific Sea Star, however there is an awareness of these risk factors, which will be monitored. This exciting program will be watched by all interested in our estuaries, and perhaps it might provide a brighter future for these important resources. This is a marvellous example of cooperation between Fisheries Victoria and the Albert Park Yachting and Angling Club to achieve the start of a project that might change our vision of our estuaries in the future.

Editor

Projects like this provide a wonderful example of what can be initiated with minimal seeding funding and prospects of a result that will change Port Phillip Bay and provide a model for other estuaries. Perhaps the Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Committee could consider such an approach, in the hope the Gippsland Lakes will be restored and protected for future generations.

Sources

[Article](#) “Rebuilding Port Phillip Bay Shellfish Reefs” by Ross Winstanley Fishing Monthly Magazine August 2014 (This is an excellent article that provides historical background to this project)

[Material](#) Provided by Bob Pearce Albert Park Angling Committee Chairman.

[Fishing Lines](#) (Winter 2014) Habitat Habitat by Bob Pearce.

Bob Pearce writes, “The Fisheries guys, especially Anthony Foster and Paul Hamer have done a fantastic job right from the start” VRFish is a supporter of this pilot project.

Editor-Congratulations to all involved.

The Albert Park Yachting and Angling Club was formed in 1909 and at the formal opening around 2000 spectators attended. Today the club has a membership of 1500 and a waiting list to join. The club is situated on the Hobsons Bay foreshore and has wonderful views and access to the bay. The club premises house 64 boats with upstairs facilities that include a banquet Hall and Dining facilities and a licensed bar.

The Gurnaikunai People and Indigenous Fishing

The above is the heading of a paper I received from Henri Ellis, former Principal at Lakes Entrance Secondary School. In this paper, Henri examines the use of fishhooks by aboriginal fishermen with particular emphasis on Lake Tyers. From his research, he makes the point that as early as 1844 a member of a party of Europeans who ventured into Gippsland made reference to the use of fishhooks by the Gurnaikunai people. Supporting this view since 1888, the Museum of Victoria has held a specimen of a fishhook from Lake Tyers made from kangaroo bone and tied with twine made from the bark of a Blackwood tree. (See photo below)



This paper arouses ones interest in the early fishing on Lake Tyers by the Gurnaikunai people.

This paper will be reproduced in the next issue of the Paynesville Maritime Museum Journal to be published in November. However, the author has kindly made it possible for readers of this newsletter to have a personal copy of the paper by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Around the Jetties (at the address on the first page of this Newsletter.)

As a postscript to this paper, if anyone has any information on indigenous fishing techniques or knows of early settlers' accounts of the same, the Paynesville Maritime Museum would be grateful if you could share that information with them, especially any evidence of Gurnai Kurnai fish pens in the Gippsland Lakes and

feeder rivers.

Thanks to Henri Ellis for making this paper available and allowing us to distribute it to readers who have an interest in the early history of Lake Tyers.

Port Phillip Snapper Stocks have a Bright Future

In a media release on the 23rd September scientific surveys recorded the fifth best snapper spawning success since the surveys began 22 years ago. Fisheries Executive Director, Ross McGowan said the result was even better when considered alongside last year's survey results that recorded the third best snapper spawning in two decades. It takes 3-4 years for snapper to reach 28cm the legal minimum size and 6-7 years to enter the adult fishery at 40cms.

Mr McGowan added, "Port Phillip Bay is the major spawning and nursery area for the western snapper stock so the high levels of spawning success like we have seen over the last couple of years, affects the future productivity of the entire stock, well beyond the Bay"

Given this information, anglers should be able to look forward to a great snapper season in 2014/15.

The Lake Tyers Opening

In the last issue of Around the Jetties we described the illegal opening of Lake Tyers and the committee made up of the Catchment Management Authority, DEPI, and East Gippsland Shire who were to supervise opening of the estuary when required. We contacted Ken Judd of the committee to oversee the opening, questioning how with this new committee such an opening was allowed to occur. Mr Judd responded. "I am sorry but I am unable to confirm any rumours in regard to Lake Tyers opening. Please note our advice to the community last week." This statement was made despite some residents of Lake Tyers seeing the attempt to achieve an artificial opening being made. I was interested to read in the Lakes Post Wednesday October 1st a letter from David Cunningham of Lake Tyers describing a meeting of local residents and business people with Mr Judd to discuss this illegal activity. Questions such as why the offender was not prosecuted, the effect of the artificial opening on the environment, and safety issues associated with this opening were discussed.

David Cunningham described the result of this meeting stating, "Mr Judd was sympathetic and listened to locals? He indicated he would investigate the matter further and initiate intervention as appropriate."

Congratulations to the local residents and business people who have indicated the public concern at the illegal opening of this estuary. The public will now wait to hear the results of the further investigation and the intervention by the committee that was only recently set up to safeguard the opening of Lake Tyers.

Big Boost in Barramundi Aquaculture

I read recently that aquaculture company, Marine Produce Australia operating in Cone Bay WA, is expanding its salmon production and hopes within a few years to rival the Tasmanian production of this species. In June, the company gained the approval of the WA Government to expand production from 1,000 tonnes to 7,000 tonnes of barramundi annually. The aquaculture zone covers 2000 hectares of Cone Bay. MPA now sells barramundi whole for \$12 per kilo and demand exceeds supply. The barramundi are kept in large cages after hand rearing on nearby Turtle Island. The fish reach a marketable size in three years. Cone Bay has 11 metre tides and this flow of water causes the fish to swim continuously, and the company believes this assists in developing a quality product. The tidal flow also ensures the fish are in clean water all the time. Currently 70% of seafood eaten in Australia is imported.

[Source Weekend Australian September 28th](#)

As well as this increase in production, three groups of indigenous people are looking to enter the Cone Bay aquaculture production of barramundi, and the WA responsible Minister suggests Cone Bay could produce over 100,000 tonnes of barramundi annually.

Editor

This massive production should be compared by this states Government with the 38tonnes of bream netted annually in the Gippsland Lakes apart from years when flood events occur. There is no protection from commercial nets for the spawning fish at the mouth of rivers or in times of flood.



VRFish September Update

1. VRFish Wish List

This wish list was developed over two years by the State Council and identifies future investment priorities for Victorian Recreational fisheries. VRFish is continuing to meet all the political parties to discuss the level of support they can expect over the next four years.

Editor *I believe it is unfortunate that this wish list has not been discussed with anglers. It is important that political parties who contribute over \$50 million annually to the Grand Prix realise that \$4 million annually contributed to recreational fishing is insufficient, given the contribution of recreational fishing and tourism to this state and particularly to the economies of rural areas.*

Around the Jetties Local Wish List

1. Buyback of commercial netting licences using Licence funds so it is cost negative for the Government. This could lead to massive changes and protection of the resource which is currently under threat.
2. A negotiated exclusion zone for the Maasbanker trawler to provide unobstructed surf fishing for anglers in areas of the 90 mile beach, and areas close to Lakes Entrance. Anglers have paid a licence for this right.
3. Removal of the dam on the Nicholson River, to allow fish access to the Gippsland Lakes to spawn.
4. The immediate introduction of steps to protect spawning fish at the mouth of rivers flowing into the Gippsland Lakes. The no netting zone at the mouth of rivers should be extended from 400 metres to 1 kilometre. The current government had a commitment to protect spawning fish at the mouth of rivers, however that commitment has been totally disregarded.
5. The immediate closure of the Cunningham Arm to commercial netting. This arm is a major attraction to both young and elderly tourists who come to the lakes.
6. Tracks and camping facilities in Lake Tyers should be the subject of an inquiry, given the seeming lack of any long term plan, despite many meetings on this subject.

The current sitting member and all candidates should be asked to state where they stand on these issues of importance to local recreational anglers. As I write this newsletter no recreational fishing policy has been announced by any of the parties or candidates. Why not drop them a line, and seek some answers.

East Gippsland recreational anglers and tourists deserve better than this.

VRFish September Update continued

2. Changes to Murray Cod Season

The changes to the Murray cod regulations, which involve a slot size of 50-70cms, will be introduced at the commencement of the 2014 Murray cod season on the 1st December. As well as the slot size a bag of one fish per day will apply to rivers and two fish per day for lakes and impoundments.

3. 7th World Recreational Fishing Conference Brazil

Russel Conway VRFish chairman, Dallas D'Silva VRFish General Manager and Anthony McGrath of the Ballarat District Anglers Association have just returned from this important conference. Animal welfare activists protested at the start of the conference, which was interesting given the focus of the conference was to minimise stress and harm to fish. VRFish is preparing details of this conference for anglers and is involved in ensuring fish that are released have the best chance of survival.

4. Measuring the Economic Contribution of Recreational Fishing.

VRFish has been successful in obtaining a grant for a comprehensive assessment of the economic contribution of recreational fishing to the State of Victoria. The last study undertaken by Ernst and Young was more than six years ago. The new study will be using up to date information and will assist in the planning ahead for recreational fishing and will include the Gippsland lakes.

Editor It is strange that the Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Committee is also currently undertaking a study of the social and economic value of fishing in the Gippsland Lakes. \$50,000 has been allocated to this study, and it talks of refining fisheries management. Very little other information is available on this project and I have not seen any media releases describing this project.

The Bemm River Report Provided by Don Cunningham



The lake is still closed, and is about half full. It would take about 100mls of rain to fill. With an extra metre of water in the lake and there being no tidal influence, anglers can choose the lake, river or channel to fish. Reports indicate some good catches, with a few flathead as well as bream. Spawning bream seem to be spread out, with a school of them stacked up in the channel. I have fished for four sessions catching bream, but most of them have been under 30cms, which were all released. Afternoon seems to be the best time, and every now and then some better quality bream up to 40cms come along.

The river has schools of bream in the deep holes, and they can be found at about the 5-metre depth. Fish are taking prawn and sandworm; it just depends on the angler's preference. The bream are well upstream and bank fishing at Dolly's Garden and further up on the fishing platform has been productive.

I saw a lovely bream as well as three flathead caught from the fishing platform in the lake. The angler told me about a 68cm flathead he landed, and then got his photo before releasing it. The lake is patchy, bream are harder to find, however the shallows seem to be a good option.

The surf has been very quiet.

Editor Thanks to Don for this report. The Statewide Recreational Fishing Roundtable at its March meeting decided to investigate possible actions and improvements to access the Bemm River. At the June meeting of the same body no report was forthcoming, and Don Cunningham had not been contacted for any information even though he had been involved with the issue of access since 1996. The banks of the Bemm River are largely overgrown to such an extent that access from beside the road is nearly impossible, and meanwhile the landholder who has fenced the river off seems to have no intention of changing his current position. I look forward to hearing a report on this issue from Fisheries Victoria.

The Law and Recreational Anglers



A Geelong west man appeared in Geelong Magistrates court recently to face a number of charges after buying illegally caught fish from a recreational fisher for sale through his retail business. DEPI Fisheries Officer, Paul Millar, said the man and the company he was a Director of pleaded guilty to being in possession of illegally obtained snapper and creating false documents.

Both the man and the company were convicted and fined \$3000 and \$5000 respectively on charges of selling fish in contravention of the Fisheries Act.

The retailer and another seafood wholesaler supplied false documents and a commercial fisherman assisted by creating false catch record claiming he had caught the fish.

Mr Millar said this case provided a reminder that recreationally caught fish cannot be bought and sold and significant penalties apply to those who are willing to take that risk.

Cormorants and the Gippsland Lakes

In recent days I have received several letters on the subject cormorants and their effect on fish stocks and particularly black bream. This newsletter has covered the issue of cormorants previously and my book on black bream "Black Bream in the Gippsland Lakes has a whole chapter on this topic. The following are some points to consider.

1. A major study was undertaken in 1957 by John McNally in which 1,224 black cormorants were shot and the stomach contents analysed
2. It was found that in estuarine waters bream made up 30% of the diet and mullet 23%.
3. The average weight of black cormorants were recorded as 5.5lbs
4. McNally acknowledges, "the black cormorant preys heavily on the bream and Mullet in estuarine waters."
5. Cormorants will feed on whatever prey is available so native fish and trout are eaten in large numbers on inland streams.
6. On the basis research it would appear that a black cormorant in the Gippsland Lakes eats about 1 kilogram of food daily of which about 30% or 300 grams is bream.
7. A bream of 1lb 6oz was recorded in the stomach of a black cormorant but this was an isolated occurrence.
8. McNally believes the major predation of the black cormorant occurs in the spring months.

This is an important study, and it is unlikely to be ever replicated, as the black cormorant is now a protected bird. **McNally indicated that no evidence existed to prove that culling of black cormorants by shooting had any effect.**

“On the 27th April 1921 the Chief Inspector of Fisheries and Wildlife reported that 10,166 cormorants were killed and 5000 eggs had been destroyed. McNally concluded there was nothing to show this reduced cormorant predation.”

Jim Reside and Patrick Coutin undertook the only other study undertaken on the “Estimation of Cormorant Numbers and the Diet and Fish Consumption of the Black Cormorant in the Gippsland Lakes,” in 2000. This study used analysis of the regurgitated stomach pellets of the black cormorant to provide information, given they could no longer shoot birds, and they had little luck using nets to capture birds. The study indicated that there is very little breeding of black cormorants around the Gippsland Lakes, which supports the theory that the main breeding of this species takes place in the Murray Darling Basin.

The numbers of cormorants on the Gippsland Lakes have varied greatly on a yearly basis and numbers also vary according to the time of the year. This study suggested that since 1987 the population of great cormorants has increased threefold, but it has also fluctuated greatly from year to year (In 1991 there were only 2-300 black cormorants but this had risen to 3500 birds in 1998.) The estimate of food intake for the black cormorant from this study was 18.6% of the average body weight and this is similar to the results obtained by McNally in the 1957 survey.

This in 1998 resulted in an estimated total fish consumption of between 261-531 tonnes and in 1998 this was probably equal to the combined weight of the commercial and recreational catch for that year. So yes, the black cormorant has a marked effect on the numbers of black bream and mullet and this may be higher following periods of high recruitment resulting from successful spawning.

Both McNally in 1957 and Reside and Coutin in 2000 urged further studies of cormorant numbers and their diet and the fish stocks of the Gippsland Lakes.

Sources

Cormorants in Victoria By John McNally Senior Research Officer Fisheries Victoria 1957

Fish Predation by the Great Cormorant in the Gippsland Lakes by P.C.Coutin & J.Reside 2000

Black Bream in the Gippsland Lakes “An Anglers View” by Lynton Barr 2000



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

James Smith to the Select committee upon the Fisheries Industry of Victoria 26th July 1892.

At times like this one can only wonder at the use of funds by the Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Committee to fund producing CDs, triathlons, art shows etc when those same funds could be funding research into the question of fish predation by black cormorants, after all it is 15 years since any research on this topic was undertaken.

Statewide Recreational Fishing Roundtable 13th June 2014

The following are some of the points of interest from the Statewide Recreational fishing Roundtable for June. This body is made up of Fisheries Victoria Managers and a number of other representatives determined by the Chairman of the Roundtable and the Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria.

- 1. Willows-** Anthony Forster (FV) confirmed that in his discussions with CMA’s eight out of nine indicated the issue of willows on river banks was a contentious issue.
- 2. Recreational Fishing Licence-** The RFL Licence remains a priority with July 2015 for a new licence to be introduced. The Minister indicated to the reference group his concern at the effect it may have on pensioners.
- 3. Boat Safety** - Concern has been expressed at the type of boats being used in the Southern Blue Fin Fishery. Marine Safety is looking at this issue and with inspections ensuring boats are correctly equipped.
- 4. Access** problems for anglers wishing to fish Lake Bullen Merri were discussed.
- 5. Trout Fishing** - In response to poor wild trout fishing in the NE and a snap shot survey that showed fish abundance in lower reaches was at a historically low level. Suggested overfishing, high water temperatures, changes to riparian shading, habitat degradation, failed wild trout breeding, and predation by cormorants might be reasons for the low fish rates in the King, Howqua, Jamieson and Upper Goulbourn Rivers. A trout reference group has been formed to examine this issue in the NE. The Gippsland region did not rate a single comment.
- 6. NSW Access to Streams** - Alistair Burnie NSW Fisheries Manager presented NSW Fisheries Access Program for discussion. He made the point of the benefits of recreational fishing, which in NSW has over 1 million anglers and accounts for over 40% of nature based recreation in NSW. Recreational fishing is valued at \$1.5 billion per annum in the Murray Darling Basin. Anglers in NSW are working with landholders and local communities to enhance access to rivers etc.
- 7. Fisheries Manager-** Brian Mottram indicated in his report of eight projects removing in stream barriers and installing fish ladders. (One can only wonder why the Nicholson River Dam is not one of these projects.)

8. Election Commitments- Parliamentary member Bill Sykes announced that election commitments would be announced by the current government, within the next 2-3 months. (Note this statement was made on the 13th June, and we still have no election commitments from the current government.

9. Ross Winstanley as a member of the Ministers Fisheries Advisory Council had written a submission on the Recreational Fishing Licence, and how a new structure can be a benefit to anglers.

Editor-*I have now read a number of the reports of these meetings and apart from the issue raised by Don Ellis of the Metropolitan Anglers Association regarding access to the Bemm River, I have seen little else of matters relevant to East Gippsland or the Gippsland Lakes mentioned in the summary of these meetings. The problems associated with this states biggest estuary such as the decline in black bream stocks and the decline and now the collapse of the dusky flathead have not rated a mention, and the same can be said for wild trout in the East Gippsland High Country.*

Letters Letters

I received the following letter from Peter Winter (29/9/14) on the issue of the government commitment “to protect spawning fish at the mouth of rivers by introducing controls on the practice of commercial netting near the mouths of rivers.”

“As reported in Lynton’s Newsletter (see below), concerned to see the lack of action on this very important commitment. Is there any chance VRFish can lobby this obvious deceit displayed by the current government? We are concerned recreational anglers of the Gippsland lakes and have seen a dramatic decline in fish stocks due to commercial netting over the last 50 years. THIS HAS TO STOP

Hope you can help, kind regards ...Peter Winter and friends.

Peter Winter MFB”

Editor- I regard this commitment one of the most important, given the parlous state of black bream stocks in the Gippsland lakes. I find it hard to understand how ten commercial fishermen have such power and how the wishes of hundreds of recreational anglers count for so little. Thanks for your comments Peter.

A View of Around the Jetties

The following letter received on the 9/10/14 from reader Trevor Hawkins was sent to Ted Hopkins former Carlton premiership footballer.

“Hi Ted,

I’ve not long moved to Ballarat from the Gippsland Lakes area and when I was there I subscribed (free) and still do, to a very vocal and well researched “keep the bastards honest” email newsletter called Around the Jetties (see attached). Lynton Barr and his wife do a fantastic job through the newsletter working tirelessly to improve the local (and wider) fishery as well as highlighting bad practices (private, commercial and governmental) as they see it. I hope you don’t mind but I’ve taken the liberty of including them in on your email to me in the knowledge that Lynton would certainly be interested, but he may also be inclined to publish in their newsletter. They have a broad base of readers and I know that Fisheries and the Government do read it.

Regards Trevor”

Editor- Thanks Trevor for those comments. We would be very interested in receiving information. On another matter I will recall your correspondent Ted Hopkins in his playing days with Carlton, and it’s great to hear of him as an “avid kayak and angling enthusiast.”

Around the Jetties on Line

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

The newsletter will still be emailed to readers, unless you indicate you wish to unsubscribe, and of course, those who do not have access to email facilities will still receive hard copies.

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