

# Around the Jetties

December 2014

Issue No 85

An Anglers Newsletter

**I still don't know why I fish or other men fish,  
except that we like it and it makes us think and feel.**

**Roderick L Haig-Brown. A River Never Sleeps (1946)**

**Merry Xmas to all Our Readers**



## Editorial

I am pleased to see the Government **allocate \$2 million for voluntary buybacks in the Gippsland Lakes**; however, it would have been far easier to implement, and better for the lakes if commercial netting had been phased out with a compulsory buyback over four years. I would just point out this funding should not be directed to making voluntarily retired fishermen millionaires, but rather it should be aimed at ensuring a reduction in netting pressure in the Gippsland Lakes. (On ABC morning program, Daryl

Sumner CEO Lakes Entrance Fisheries Cooperative suggested that the \$2 million might only buy back two commercial licences.)

What is of great concern is the release of the **“Report on commercial fishing near Gippsland Lakes river mouths.”** Anglers waited over three years for some action from the coalition Government to meet its commitment to protect spawning fish and to have this report released. What will bring despair to many is the recommendation from this report that **“No additional controls on commercial netting in the Gippsland Lakes are needed”** and **“the 400 metre commercial fishing exclusion zones will remain.”**

This is a major setback for recreational anglers who have over many years sought protection for fish at the mouth of rivers from commercial netting, particularly during spawning and flood events. This means the status quo remains, there will be no change in the current situation, and massive kills of black bream will occur when the rivers flood as has occurred in the past and will occur in the future.

(See the summary of this report ,page 2)

**The following sums up the feeling of many anglers** and was reported in Issue 79 of Around the Jetties April 2014 following an East Gippsland Catchment Management invitation program on the Nicholson River.

Ken Bradley President of the Nicholson Angling Club spoke-*The Nicholson Club had been actively involved in projects with Fisheries Victoria such as the electronic tagging of bream, and riverbank restoration including tree planting and fencing out stock from riverbanks. The club regularly runs*

*education days for young anglers but these days have been handicapped by an almost total lack of fish for young anglers when they apply what they have learnt.*

*This year marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Nicholson Angling Club. When the club was formed, it had over 300 members who came to the area to fish for bream whilst at the same time bringing economic benefits to the area. Today the club has 90 members. The club until a couple of years ago had five major competitions per year, today the club has only one, and to provide the chance of catching fish the boundaries for that competition have been increased to include Lake Tyers. Ken stated that without the inclusion of Lake Tyers the club would be a social club, so poor is the fishing in the beautiful Nicholson River.*

Ken concluded his talk with the following statement, **“the only way to catch fish in the Nicholson River is to get rid of commercial netting at the mouth of this river.”**

Anglers and Clubs **were not** invited to provide submissions on the netting at the mouth of rivers issue, however, a meeting will be held to discuss the research that has been undertaken.

**Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> December 7.00-8.30 at Lakes Entrance Mechanics Institute 18 Mechanics St.**

It does appear that attendance at this meeting is by invitation only, and since this research affects all anglers I find an **invitation only meeting** most surprising. Perhaps if you or your club wish to be represented at this meeting you might contact **Bill Lussier**, Manager Marine and Estuarine Fisheries on **5258 0206** and seek an invitation. You should also seek to have a hard copy of this report mailed to you or your club.

Last week I received a note from Ross McGowan, Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria, approving the continuation of the dusky flathead regulations setting minimum and maximum size limits for dusky flathead in Victorian waters by means of a Fisheries (Dusky Flathead) Notice.

The minimum size for taking dusky flathead is 30cms and the maximum size is 55cms. These size limits will remain for the next twelve months.

Ross McGowan stated, “The 30cm size limit implemented by this Fisheries Notice was not put in place for sustainability reasons but was agreed to following the consultation with recreational anglers who advised that this is the minimum size for a table-size dusky flathead”

In his response to my submission the Executive Director stated, **“I acknowledge your concerns that commercial fishers in the Gippsland Lakes are not required to comply with the slot size created by this Fisheries Notice. I have decided to exclude the commercial fishers from this requirement because of the high level of mortality that would occur among the large dusky flathead released from commercial nets.”**

I have seen no research suggesting a high level of mortality amongst released large female dusky flathead.

Overall, it has been a very good month for the ten commercial fishermen of the Gippsland Lakes, and recreational anglers can only wonder at what could have been in the Gippsland Lakes, if responsible decisions protecting the fish stocks had been made.

## **No Change in River Mouth Regulations**

**“Investigating the impacts of net fishing near river mouths during the spawning season”** is a 24-page report that was released on the 11<sup>th</sup> November, 19 days before the state Election and was in answer to a commitment of the coalition made to recreational anglers in 2010. The commitment was to protect spawning fish at the mouth of rivers, however this commitment changed in the last twelve months to researching the commitment and ultimately with **a somewhat contentious report that backs doing nothing to protect spawning fish**. I must say I have read dozens of Fisheries reports and provided summaries for anglers from most of them, however I have never read a report as confusing as this report. There is a suggestion that **when a river reaches a certain height, a commercial closure would be introduced. This has never been a factor in any discussion of protecting spawning fish at the mouth of rivers.**

The study took into account the period 2003-2012 including the 2012 Black Bream Stock Assessment. The average annual catch of estuary perch 1,037kgs and bass 18kgs were excluded from this report as it suggests the quantities indicate that commercial fishers do not target these species even though they move to the Gippsland Lake from the rivers. This view takes no account of the increased stocking of bass in these rivers and the fact that the movement to the lakes would be expected to grow with further increased bass stocking.- Note 400,000 bass in East Gippsland Waters since 2002. The report limits itself to black bream, and the

period of spawning September to February. This is questionable as that Dr Joel Williams article “**The Secret lives of Black Bream**” indicates that bream “spend more time in rivers from June through to December and more time in the lakes February to March.” In other words during winter the fish begin moving to the upper estuary and rivers in search of lower salinity so the movement into the river may be over a longer period than September to February.

The report then investigates the relationship between river heights, catch rates and the outcomes that various closures may have on commercial fishing.

I have never heard suggestions of commercial closures associated with river heights previously mentioned. I believe this clouds what is a simple issue and the classifying as *large and very large catches* simply adds to the problem of understanding that issue.

It appears that in the period 2004-2012 there were seven occasions where river heights were greater than 4 metres and a number of occasions where the height was greater than 3 metres. The report goes into studying the effects of river flow based closures on commercial fishing to protect spawning fish and the impacts of these closures.

It is suggested this research shows –the following Conclusions

1. When considered along with the 2012 DEPI black bream stock Assessment, 2012 commercial fishers do not cause a significant impact on the spawning success or subsequent recruitment to the fishery.

2. Given the low frequency of large and very large catches, their occurrence across all river heights and their impact suggests river height based closures are not an efficient mechanism to ensure that commercial netting near river mouths in the Gippsland Lakes does not interfere with fish moving in and out of rivers during the spawning season.

#### **Editor**

If we return to the real issue this is not about commercial closures, but rather what should the exclusion zone for commercial fishing be from the mouth of rivers. This question did not seem to be addressed in this report and yet it was the basis for the concerns expressed by recreational anglers over many years. Currently it is 400 metres and it is unmarked.

The late Peter Spehr, an amazing recreational fisherman who tagged over 5,000 bream and dusky flathead in a detailed response to the draft Fisheries Regulations of 2008 wrote, “*Netting restrictions should be extended to a kilometre from river mouths, the Barrier, the areas around Metung and Cunningham Arm should be totally protected from commercial netting.*” Such a move would protect spawning fish and the regular movement of black bream in and out of the rivers and surely, 6-8 commercial fishers would have sufficient scope for netting without placing any species at risk if only this simple step had been taken. In simple terms, the following was the commercial catch 2006/7-2008/9 and it can readily be seen that almost 100 tonnes of black bream above the average annual catch has been removed in this one year.

#### **Example Commercial catch of Black Bream in the Gippsland Lakes**

2006/7 **49 tonnes** 2007/8 **Flood Year 144 tonnes** 2008/9 **36 tonnes**

I would suggest in the period 2003/4 –2012/13 on three occasions flood events caused catches well above the average 38.6 tonnes (excluding flood years) with the most recent 2011/12 with 96 tonnes of bream removed and 2012/13 with 81 tonnes of bream removed. These catches will continue to reduce the black bream stock.

When the local member Tim Bull was asked in November 2013, about the delay in resolving the issue of protecting fish at the mouth of rivers he responded-

“Fisheries Victoria has recently commenced a review of netting around river mouths in the Gippsland lakes and I am advised this will be looking at the relationship between floods and commercial catchrates and spawning periods. I am also advised there will be an opportunity for stakeholders input once some basic data has been compiled.”

It does not appear that stakeholders will have any significant input with a meeting called to understand better this research rather than to provide input into the research.

In the 2010 flood event commercial fisherman, Arthur Allen is quoted as saying under the heading “Fish Flood into the Gippsland Lakes” (ABC Rural News 10th August 2010) that it’s been a good week for lakes fishers, who have enjoyed a boost to catches. “The difference between fishermen and farmers is when it rains, farmers have got to wait for the grass to grow, but we get the benefits immediately.” Those immediate benefits are the catch of spawning fish forced from the rivers by the freshwater flow into commercial nets set within 400 metres of the river mouths. The removal of these spawning black bream must have a long-term effect on the black bream stock.

I am unaware if this specific problem has ever been seriously investigated and certainly, this report does not address the long-term effect of this commercial netting.

**This report has done nothing to protect spawning fish, and does not address the problem in a practical way.**

Sources- Dr Joel Williams "The Secret Lives of Black Bream"

Fishermen Welcome Flood Events (ABC Rural 10/9/2010)

## Major Upgrade for Lake Tyers Launching Ramp

A gathering of members of the Lake Tyers Beach Angling club and interested locals occurred at the No 2 launching ramp Lake Tyers on Friday 31<sup>st</sup> of October at 8.30am. Local member, Tim Bull MP, announced funding of \$300,000 to upgrade the launching ramp to a dual ramp, to cater for the increased usage of this estuary by recreational anglers.

This announcement was part of a number of similar announcements in previous days that included an \$800,000 Metung wharf extension and upgrade and a new public destination jetty at the end of Myer St, Lakes Entrance for recreational boaters, plus a \$485,000 new jetty extension and 24-hour refuelling facilities in the Paynesville marine precinct.



Given the closeness of the state election, the local member indicated that the Lake Tyers project would go ahead regardless of the election result. Mr Bull also observed that even on this morning, the car park was full and an extension to the car park in the future was a matter for consideration. I am aware that this is also the view of the Lake Tyers Angling Club and preliminary planning is already being undertaken to satisfy this need in the future. This launching ramp development is to be undertaken by the East Gippsland Shire, and it is expected that work will commence shortly after Easter 2015, with the project completed for the 2015/16 Xmas period. The Mayor, Cr Mark Reeves, spoke on behalf of the shire thanking Mr Bull for his interest and commending the ability of the shire to work with the government on projects such as this upgrade.

John Harrison, Secretary of the Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club spoke on behalf of the Angling Club and welcomed community members to the announcement of this development. John suggested that a decade or so ago few people recognised Lake Tyers. Now this estuary is one of this states premier fishing spots attracting anglers from across the state. John made the point that the surface of the current ramp is breaking up and has the potential to cause considerable damage to boats being launched and so the new dual ramp will be a great improvement.

John also indicated to local member Tim Bull that the Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club was currently seeking a release of estuary perch, and that this estuary formerly had a considerable population of this species. It is thought their numbers were depleted by commercial netting. An odd estuary perch is still caught in Lake Tyers, however the Angling Club believes an attempt should be made to restore this species to the estuary.



John pointed out that the club was primarily responsible for the upgrade of launching facilities at Fisherman's Landing which has added to the facilities available in this special estuary. In concluding, John thanked Tim Bull for his support in bringing this project to fruition and Anthony Nelson, Strategic Program Planner of the East Gippsland Shire, for his contribution to a successful outcome of both the Fisherman's Landing

project of a floating jetty and the current announced project of a dual ramp and floating pontoon launching facility at Lake Tyers.

John Harrison- "Now Tim. What about Extra Parking facilities?"

### Editor

The projects undertaken by this angling club are quite outstanding. They will have completely changed access to Lake Tyers when the current project is completed. At the same time, the club is looking to improve fish stocks for anglers in these pristine waters. As an observer, I believe this angling club is extremely lucky to have a secretary with such energy and foresight and the ability to gain the support of his club members to achieve such outcomes. Congratulations to all of Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club members. It really does show what can be achieved with an active angling club in a community.

## **\$65 Million Better Bay Plan for Port Phillip and Corio Bays Buyback of Commercial Licences**

*The Napthine Government has recently announced (Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> November) if re-elected on the 29<sup>th</sup> November, it would deliver a \$65 million **Better Bay Plan for Port Phillip and Corio Bays with \$20 million over 4 years to buyback commercial licences. The Government believes** "this will significantly improve recreational fishing opportunities through greater fish numbers in the bay which will in turn boost the recreational fishing industry and see benefits flow on to local businesses." Dr Napthine added, "Our vision is for Port Phillip Bay and Corio Bay to be recreational fishing meccas for locals and visitors."*

*"The \$20 million funding commitment over four years would provide a fair and equitable exit strategy for licence holders and the buyback would be phased to minimise the impacts on the commercial industry" however he firmly stated "commercial netting in Port Phillip Bay and Corio Bay will be phased out"*

A number of other initiatives including bike paths, erosion protection, improving fishing piers and beach patrol volunteers with investment into surf life saving clubs make up this \$65 million initiative.

### **Gippsland Lakes Get \$2 Million Voluntary Buyback**

I am sure Gippsland recreational anglers congratulate the Napthine Government on the initiative of buying back commercial licences in Port Phillip and Corio Bays, but wondered at the lack of any similar buyback for commercial fishers in the Gippsland Lakes.

Then on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November in a second Media release, it was announced that the Coalition Government would commit to **a \$2 million voluntary buyback for commercial fishers in the Gippsland Lakes.**

Readers of this newsletter would be aware that several commercial fishers approached the local member in 2012 seeking a buyback. The response at that time from Tim Bull local member was

*"Any buyout needs to be funded and this has been a matter for both the Minister and the Treasurer to consider. I have had further ongoing discussions with the commercial fishermen on this matter following the original request last year."(2012) (Around the Jetties Issue 72 November 2013)*

Minutes after the Media Release being announced, Dale Sumner, of the Lakes Entrance Fisherman's Cooperative, was speaking on ABC Rural radio. He very quickly suggested that the

**\$2 million voluntary buyback was probably sufficient funds to buy back two licences.** He also made the point that the fishery in the Gippsland Lakes was in a healthy sustainable condition, **so the buy back was not about improving fish numbers** but was rather catering for a very limited number of fishers (2) who wanted to leave the fishery. This is a strange approach.

**The fact is that the Port Phillip and Corio Bay fisheries are sustainable** and readers might remember the recent item in the last issue of Around the Jetties indicating that a scientific survey released on the 23<sup>rd</sup> September recorded the fifth best snapper spawning success in Port Phillip Bay since the surveys began 22 years ago. (Around the Jetties Issue 84 November 2014)

### **Are The Gippsland Lakes A Sustainable Fishery?**

With regard to the Gippsland Lakes being a sustainable fishery, as declared by Dale Sumner, I draw readers attention to the item headed **"Ten Years Ago"** from the front page of the Bairnsdale Advertiser, 17<sup>th</sup> October 2003, which reports on the 2003 Black Bream Stock Assessment organised by Fisheries Victoria. This report

refers to the collapse of the bream stocks in the Gippsland Lakes based on the 26 tonne commercial catch of that year. Compare that figure with the commercial catch in the decade of the 80's when the average annual catch was 255 tonnes of black bream, and it is very hard to see any statistics supporting the vision of a sustainable fishery today.

In real terms, the total commercial catch of all species in 2012/13 is a mere **215 tonnes, the smallest total catch in the last 40 years.** The average annual catch of black bream excluding years with a flood event is **38.6 tonnes.** As indicated in the last Around the Jetties, the catch of dusky flathead in the Gippsland Lakes has declined from 48 tonnes in 2005/6 to a dangerously small 8 tonnes in 2012/13.

In other words, **there is a far stronger case for a compulsory buyback of Gippsland Lakes commercial licences based on the sustainability of the fishery, than the case advanced for Port Phillip and Corio Bays.**

Whilst recreational anglers are pleased to see any reduction in the number of commercial fishermen netting the Gippsland Lakes, it is strange to see \$2 million allocated to a voluntary buy back with a possibility of this covering only two licences. It just so happens in 2012, two commercial fishermen approached the local member seeking the buyback be again placed on the table. Surely, the \$2 million voluntary buyback would not be directed at two commercial fishers who sought a buyback previously.

To "significantly improve recreational fishing opportunities through greater fish numbers in the Gippsland Lakes which in turn will boost the recreational fishing industry and see benefits flow on to local businesses," (Naphthine Govt media release.) **then the coalition must make any buyback compulsory and fund it accordingly.**

## **Ten Years Ago**

**Front Page The Advertiser Friday October 17<sup>th</sup> 2003**

**The following was a front page heading of the Bairnsdale Advertiser 2003 "Bream Fishery Crisis" and included the statement from the 2003 black bream assessment stating, "Saturday's session was led by Mr Sandy Morrison from MAFFRI. A range of data was presented which supported the belief that the bream fishery had collapsed." Further "it was stated at Saturday's meeting that the catch of black bream had dropped from 154 tonnes in 2001/2 to 28 tonnes in 2003/4. This represents an 82% drop and is the smallest commercial catch of black bream since 1959."**

This statement from the front page of the Advertiser is a reminder of the massive decline in black bream stocks in the Gippsland Lakes in the last decade. The situation is made worse by the need for black bream to enter the rivers to spawn because of the level of salinity in the Gippsland Lakes. Dr Joel Williams now with Western Australian Fisheries wrote, "During winter, fish begin migrating to the upper estuary in search of lower salinity and the salt wedge, and spawn from September to December." Joel Williams also advised that in recent years, these conditions were found to be in the Mitchell River close to the highway bridge. This in turn means a massive movement of spawning black bream out of the river when a freshwater flood event occurs, and a major catch of those spawning fish by commercial nets at the mouth of rivers.

## **Funding the Compulsory and Voluntary Buybacks.**

It appears that the compulsory buyback for Port Phillip and Corio Bays will come under the regulations for determining the amount of compensation (Fisheries Regulations 2009). This takes into account the previous seven fishing seasons and the amount payable to the commercial fisher to compensate the cancelling of his licence equals three times the average of the four highest net incomes over those seven years, plus some other prescribed compensating payments. I am advised that this formula will only apply to the compulsory cancellation of a licence, as is the case in Port Phillip and Corio Bays.

In the case of the Gippsland Lakes and the \$2 million voluntary buyback according to the media release, "An independent panel would be established to make recommendations to the Victorian Government on how the buyback could be structured. This panel would consult with Seafood Industry Victoria, VRFish, Future Fish and others." Given this approach, it would appear a negotiable sum will be paid to the voluntary buybacks in the Gippsland Lakes and thus it becomes clear why Mr Sumner is suggesting that the \$2 million allocated by

the coalition Government, would only fund the voluntary buyback of two licences. Many recreational anglers would see this, as a golden handshake, which would greatly increase the value of commercial licences in the Gippsland Lakes. Perhaps the fairest approach would be to apply the regulations regarding compensation for a compulsory buyback to any voluntary buyback, to calculate fair compensation and this would mean compensation could be calculated on a tested formula that is fair for all. Recreational anglers will watch this space with great interest.

*“Port Phillip Bay will be protected and restored for all Victorians to enjoy under a re-elected Victorian Coalition Government”*

**Recreational anglers in East Gippsland, and the many anglers who come from other parts of Victoria, have the same hope for the Gippsland Lakes. A compulsory buyback of commercial licences would be a major step to achieving a restored fishery.**

## **Wooden Fish Structures on the Tambo River**

Currently wooden snags are being introduced to the Tambo River, which are somewhat different to previous structures. A pole is being driven into the riverbed and this is used to anchor the structure that follows. The photo shows a large barge with a number of these poles, and a driver to push the anchor deep into the riverbed. Anglers should be interested in this development as the funding for this project is \$99,000 derived from the licence fees of anglers with the project being undertaken by the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority.

Photos from East Gippsland Catchment Management Website

In recent times, there has been some discussion at the value of the introduction of snags to local rivers. With an allocated expenditure since 2006/7 of \$903,000 on the introduction of wooden debris, it may be time for a detailed study to be undertaken to establish just how effective the introduction of wooden debris is in achieving improvements in habitat and ultimately fish stocks in rivers associated with estuarine environments.



Dr Jeremy Hindell undertook the only study I have found on this topic, in 2006 in which he states, “to date, there has been little assessment of the use of artificial structures by estuarine fauna particularly fish.” In this study, acoustic receivers were placed at a site with large wooden debris and adult bream were implanted with transmitters and monitored for 12 months. Now it is worth noting that this study was undertaken prior to almost \$1million of anglers licence funds being expended on wooden debris. I think it fair to say that the results of this study were inconclusive with evidence that on the Mitchell River there were a greater number of hits on areas with wooden debris than in areas without debris, whilst in the Tambo River there was no difference between sites with wooden debris and those without.

The East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority placed six wooden debris structures in each of the rivers for the purpose of this project.

It is since this time and that project, that a further \$903,000 has been provided to the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority over 11 years to add wooden debris structures in rivers entering the Gippsland Lakes, with the major expenditure on the provision of structures occurring in the Mitchell and Tambo Rivers.

Most recreational anglers would target snags when fishing for luderick and estuary perch. Black bream are known to feed around snags and jetty structures. Perhaps we should be scientifically examining the impact of the introduction of wooden debris to our rivers, and its effect on the numbers of fish in our estuarine river systems, rather than largely relying on the anecdotal reports of anglers, after all a considerable amount of money is being spent on this project.

Source [Hindell.J.S. \(2006\) Fishing for new ways to sustain aquatic habitats](#)  
[An outstanding book on this topic “Resnagging Revolution -Bringing Native Fish back to the Rivers.” June 2002 \(This book deals with Resnagging in the Murray River.\)](#)

## **Illegal Opening of Lake Tyers**

I spoke recently to Ken Judd of the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority who indicated that the person responsible for the illegal opening of the estuary had been identified, however no legal action would be undertaken against him. It had been decided that instead an educational approach would be undertaken to indicate the problems created by this opening. Ken Judd indicated that the local Lake Tyers community had indicated support for a strong presence of DEPI and Catchment Authorities when the lake was near breakout to ensure that a similar illegal act does not occur in the future. I am informed that in the past two persons were taken to court and fined for illegally opening the lake, so the current person responsible for this opening might consider himself very lucky. I wonder whether recreational anglers would support the view that education was a better option than court action.

## **Mercury in Gippsland Lakes Fish and Dolphins**

Since 2006 in the Gippsland Lakes, 15 dolphins of an endangered species only found in the Gippsland Lakes and Port Phillip Bay have died and it is thought mercury poisoning caused these deaths given the high levels of mercury found in the dead dolphins. This is not the first occasion that mercury in fish or dolphins in the Gippsland Lakes was evident. In 1980, Fisheries scientist J.W.Glover warned of mercury in black bream and the need for further research.

The 1998 CSIRO Audit of the Gippsland Lakes found substantial levels of mercury in black bream and noted a 40% rise since the 1980's to a level close to being dangerous to human health. A number of detailed studies were undertaken on this issue as early as 1978/9. However, the 1998 CSIRO Audit of the Gippsland Lakes and the statement by Professor Graeme Harris that, “The mercury problem does require further investigation, as the evidence indicates rising levels of mercury in fish and sediment concentrations are approaching alarmingly high levels.” brought the issue of mercury levels to the attention of recreational anglers and members of the public.

This background is of interest, as I understand three East Gippsland doctors have recently had ten black bream analysed for levels of mercury and they are concerned at the results that indicated all ten fish had high levels of mercury. I am told the doctors are most concerned at the possible effect of mercury on unborn babies when fish with higher levels of mercury are eaten by pregnant mothers to be. I am advised that the results of this study will be made public to media outlets and the initial report has been made available to the local member. I feel sure that this study will be widely discussed both by members of the public and scientific community.

Historically mining is thought to have raised mercury levels in the Gippsland Lakes. However, a paper by G.Fabris in 2004 suggested, “mercury emissions from coal fired power stations are now thought to be responsible for the elevated levels in mercury detected since 1980.” This is an issue for today and it is important that a definitive study is undertaken. Again, this is the type of study that one would expect to be undertaken by the Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Committee. In a Media Release in August 2012, Premier Napthine in announcing \$10 million to this committee stated its role was, “to Restore and Protect the Gippsland Lakes.” I believe the levels of mercury in fish and dolphins and the effect on members of the public, would fit well in any move to restore and protect the Gippsland Lakes and perhaps be of greater value than sponsoring a CD or Triathlon.

Radio National, Win News and the ABC rural program have examined this issue in detail.

[CSIRO Audit The Gippsland Lakes 1998](#)

[Lake Wellington mercury pilot study G.Fabris 2012](#)

## **Economic Study of the Recreational Fishing Contribution**



VRFish is currently project managing a 2014 study by Ernst and Young looking at the economic contribution recreational fishing makes to the state. The last major study was undertaken in 2008/9 at a time when much of Victoria was in drought. The 2014 study will have some important regional data and Dallas D'Silva, General Manager VRFish has stated that he is pleased to confirm it will include Gippsland.

What is often not recognised is the value of recreational fishing to local communities, particularly in rural areas and this evidenced by a study into the Murray Darling Basin, which indicated recreational fishing brought over \$1.3 billion dollars into this rural area.

This report found “On average recreational fishers go fishing in the basin 12 times per year, individually spending \$262 per trip. With approximately 430,000 fishers in the basin, recreational fishers spend around \$1.3 billion each year when fishing the Murray darling Basin.”

Source- Murray darling Basin Recreational Fishing Council

It also needs to be recognised that the state government pays over \$50 million to obtain the Grand Prix for Melbourne yet snapper fishing in Port Phillip Bay might be producing a greater return for little government expenditure. The decline in black bream and dusky flathead stocks will almost certainly in the long term have a profound effect on the Gippsland Lakes economic environment. This issue should be a concern for any government.

## Bemm River Report Highlights Ramp Problems



**Don Cunningham** reports-

“Low water levels that prevailed before the new moon have clearly indicated that despite the repairs to the boat ramp, most users are backing off the end of the ramp when launching or retrieving in Sydenham Inlet. Even though it has been repaired, the ramp is shorter than the original length. Rough sections in the middle of the ramp are creating problems. The pontoon is sitting on the silt at these low levels, and the boat moorings can only be used by the smallest of boats.



Don provides this graphic description of current problems in a letter on the condition of the ramp.

“Our most dangerous wind comes from the East. Most Easterly winds get up during the day and visitors are caught in very damaging waves coming at them from behind, as they try to retrieve their boats. A lot of boats that are secured to a winch rope are often swamped. The pontoon is very unstable in these conditions and will whiplash when the water is low because the area is so silted that the pontoon hammers into the silt.”



reshore Management Plan (April 2014) has been put back in this draft, the East Gippsland Shire Council has indicated a dredging, and has acknowledged that the site is exposed to wave and wind conditions. This is a big step forward because it looks at ways to provide a safe all weather and all water use facility.

Once dredged the safest site for a new ramp would be on the northern side of the walkway. This plan ticks all the boxes and provides a simple solution to what has been a long-standing issue. (See the attached plan, which indicates an extension to the car park, and provides access to the proposed jetty and boat ramp.)”

In a recent letter to Anthony Nelson East Gippsland Shires Strategic Project Planner, Don Cunningham wrote, "Bemm River has iconic status in Gippsland worthy of immediate attention. Recent low water has highlighted just how fragile our infrastructure has become. The Angling Club and Progress Association have been pushing for help since 2011."

Don raises a point for consideration when he says in this letter Council (East Gippsland Shire) has a duty of care to respond to the information that has been provided. We are at the coalface here, and are being confronted daily by many unhappy anglers." This raises the point of liability should the dangerous nature of the ramp be responsible for an accident to a person launching a boat from this ramp.

**Late Mail** I have had the following note from Don 11am 12<sup>th</sup> November- East Gippsland Shire Council (Anthony Nelson) have committed funding for preliminary survey work for dredging to be done. Don Cunningham is delighted at this positive move that he says will provide better access and meet a number of current needs.

**Editor** No information has been provided by Fisheries Victoria's on their approach to the problem of access to the Bemm River. This issue was raised at the March meeting of the Statewide Recreational Roundtable. Eight months Fisheries have not approached later Don Cunningham for background information.

## Bob McNeill's Diary Report for Lake Tyers.



This report covers the six months from June 2014 and gives a fascinating picture of recreational fishing in Lake Tyers.

Bob writes-

"The report for this period shows one of the lowest catches I have experienced and the high level of dirty water and the spawning movement of targeted fish may have contributed to this low catchrate in the early months of the period described. My fishing at this time was in the lower and up to the Trident and also the Toorloo Arm. In the period June to September I caught 96 bream however 39 were under size. The only bait used in this period was peeled local prawn, and I had best results fishing around snags rather than in open waters. In this period no other species but black bream were caught. This period covered my diary for the winter, and I commenced a new diary in September that covered my fishing through until the 30<sup>th</sup> October. Fishing improved in these months, however numbers were erratic. Over this period

174 bream were caught with 76 being undersize. The first dusky flathead I caught on the 21<sup>st</sup> September went 61 cms and this was very early for flathead in Lake Tyers. During this period you would catch one or two size fish and then need to move to another spot and this meant 8-9 moves in a 3-4 hour morning fishing period. In this period strong winds often determined where I could fish, however I generally fished the bottom lake and up to the Trident Up until the 26<sup>th</sup> October there was a substantial number of small fish most mornings but then fishing with my son Peter we managed to hit the jackpot.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of October fishing in the Trident area we caught 23 bream in the mornings fishing and that catch included 13 size fish. On this morning the catch included a 33cm snapper. Then on the 29<sup>th</sup> of October we had another great mornings fishing catching 26 bream between us of which only 6 were undersize. The real surprise of the morning was the catch of 8 dusky flathead 33-49cms and this really marked the start of the flathead season. On this morning we fished the bottom lake, and again all fish were taken on peeled prawn. An interesting observation was that the stomach contents of most bream contained white shell when caught on a sandy bottom whilst on muddy bottoms the stomach contents seemed to be fine grass or weed with a mixture of dark soil. This was a great conclusion to the six months covering a winter period with few good catches. The next period is something to look forward to.

### **Editor**

An interesting aside was that Bob's son when fishing on the surf caught a 40cm salmon and when cleaning this fish he found a 22.4cm mullet in its stomach. Even with the mullet in his stomach this salmon could not resist well-presented blue bait. Over the years I have found that for me the dusky flathead season seems to commence in the first week in November or there about but what I did find unusual was the Bob's catch of that number of flathead on peeled prawn. In the six months of Bob's report the only other species caught

were the snapper 33cms and a small salmon 27cms and a trevally of 27cms. This seems to cast some doubt on the movement of fish into the estuary, and raises the question what has happened to the large numbers of tailor this estuary once supported?  
Thanks to Bob for another fascinating diary report.

## Letters Letters

In recent years the issues that have resulted in most letters have been the actions of the Maasbanker and its effect on surf fishermen, and the matter of protection of fish at the mouth of rivers a commitment of the current government over three years ago prior to its election. The current government has resolved neither of these issues.

### AN Issue that has not been addressed

The following is a letter from a previous Newsletter (The Maasbanker Issue 75 December 2013)

That gives an indication of recreational anglers feelings, and provides a considered approach that recreational anglers would applaud.

### A Comment on the Maasbanker And Beach Netting

I received the following letter from John Blain on the 7<sup>th</sup> November 2013.

*Lynton*

*Thanks for putting those questions to the local member and publishing the responses.*

*I was particularly interested in the question and answer relating to the Maasbanker netting within 80 meters of the beaches.*

*I have been surf fishing on the beach on many occasions, rods in the sand, lines in the water and anxiously waiting for a rod to bend over for action to begin .....only to look up and find this boat, in close proximity of the shore steam past with net out, birds following and **no apparent thought** for those on the beach hoping to catch the illusive salmon. I shake my head in absolute frustration and disbelief!*

*Against these experiences, I am disappointed that the local member could only say he would be 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. **I would like to have seen a statement that indicated an action and a time frame.***

*What I cannot understand is why the Maasbanker has to fish in those limited areas the recreational fishermen have access to (i.e. the beaches off Lakes Entrance, Lake Bunga and Lake Tyers) when it has ninety miles of beach to choose from.*

*I fully accept the Maasbanker's right to take fish and acknowledge that there are a significant number of local people employed with the Maasbanker's business.*

*I also know that there is an economy that surrounds the recreational fisherman, which includes the accommodation, retail and food industry. When fishermen witness netting in the same area they are fishing in, they are unlikely to want to return.*

*I am of the opinion that excluding the Maasbanker from the above-mentioned beach locations would bring about wide benefits to the local economy while not materially impacting on the viability of the Maasbanker's business.*

*Many thanks for the diligence and hard work that must go into the work you do. You are a great advocate for the amateur fisherman and your views and representation align well with those seeking a fair go for all and a sustainable long-term fishery.*

*Kind regards*



John Blain

### **Editor**

I raised this question with local member Tim Bull MP in November 2013. My question was as follows- (Around the Jetties Issue 74 November 2013)

**Question** A continuing concern of anglers is the actions of the Maasbanker netting within 80 metres of 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 angler.

**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 catchrates 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."

**Comment**-Given the question I have doubts about the relevance of discussing Maasbanker catchrates with the Lakes Entrance Fisherman's Cooperative, and whilst being happy for discussion to take place there was no attempt by the local member to initiate that discussion on behalf of recreational anglers as was asked.

**A Personal Note.** This newsletter is the last for 2014, and has been somewhat rushed by circumstances. However, I wanted to get this current information to readers as on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> November I will be having surgery at Epworth, Box Hill, and will probably be about 10 days in hospital. I look forward to bringing you issue 86 in February 2016.

**It remains on behalf of Dawn and myself to wish our readers a very happy Christmas and New Year holiday break.**

### **Around the Jetties on Line**

If you are a new reader, we are pleased to announce that some past issues of Around the Jetties, as well as the current one, can be sourced on the Lake Tyers Beach website, at [www.laketyersbeach.net.au](http://www.laketyersbeach.net.au)

The newsletter may be emailed to readers, and of course, those who do not have access to email facilities may receive hard copies. If you are a current reader and you wish to unsubscribe just let us know.

**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. The newsletter is free.

**Good Health and Good fishing**