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# Around the Jetties

## March 2016

## Issue 99

### An Anglers Newsletter

“A fine school of Luderick entered the lakes on Wednesday... After filling all the baskets they had (137), there were about as many fish left, which were allowed their liberty again..... It only required ten fish to fill a basket, weight being 5-6lbs each, and a single fish cut up like a salmon but in thin slices, will make a good breakfast for a family of 7-8.”

(Gippsland Mercury 18<sup>th</sup> July 1878)..... Peter Synan’s Highways of Water page 160

#### Meeting with Minister Jaala Pulford



On Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> of February, I had the opportunity together with three other recreational anglers of meeting with Minister for Agriculture, Jaala Pulford and Coordinator of the Target One Million Program, Craig Ingram to discuss matters of concern in an informal meeting of almost two hours duration. The other recreational anglers involved were John Harrison (Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club Project Officer), Rob Caune (Local VRFish representative), and Denis Mathews a keen angler from Paynesville. There was no specific agenda other than a discussion on the current

Government commitment to introduce protection for spawning fish at the mouth of rivers. (For important details of this commitment see later in this newsletter.)

A brief summary of the discussion is as follows.

#### Protection of Spawning Fish at Rivermouths.

Currently the Government is undertaking a consultation process with stakeholders, on its election policy to **“ban netting at the mouth of rivers in the Gippsland Lakes.”**

Craig Ingram in coordinating this project is to report to Parliament with recommendations by the 26<sup>th</sup> August 2016. Discussion took place on the current 400 metre protection zone at the mouth of rivers and the need for greater protection. The point was made that with the stocking of bass in local rivers funded from recreational licences these fish must be protected from commercial netting as they move from the rivers to the lakes to spawn.



Statistically over 2 tonnes of estuary perch are taken from the Gippsland Lakes annually and currently there is no distinction in the statistics between bass and estuary perch.

**Commercial Netting**-The issue of commercial netting was discussed, and it was pointed out that commercial netting was proving an ongoing handicap to any steps to improving fish stocks in the Gippsland

Lakes. No restocking programs can be undertaken with black bream whilst the species is a prime target for commercial fishing. The issue of quotas for commercial fishing was introduced. It was pointed out to the Minister that some commercial fishermen were interested in a licence buyback, and that one licence had recently been put on the market. The Minister indicated that the Government did not intend entering into buyback discussions with commercial fishermen of the Gippsland Lakes in this term of Government. The recreational anglers put forward the concept of the Government providing funding for a buyback offer, and the funding being repaid from recreational fishing licence fees. This would be a cost neutral for the Government and had been previously applied to a Gippsland Lakes buyback. The Minister seemed interested in this approach.

**Fish Statistics-** A sheet providing information on the statistical decline of fish stocks was provided by the recreation anglers for the Minister, and she was very interested in the dramatic decline in dusky flathead numbers and the decline in bream numbers over the last twenty years. Denis Mathews provided a picture of what this decline meant for the sport of recreational fishing in the Paynesville area and for local businesses that were dependant on recreational fishing and were facing economic downturns as a result of the dramatic decline in recreational fishing.

**Wider Effect of the Decline in the Gippsland Lakes Recreational Fishery-**It was pointed out to the Minister that the decline in recreational fishing was having a far wider effect than just the Gippsland Lakes. Waters like Lake Tyers came under increased angling pressure as anglers bypassed the Gippsland Lakes for the better fishing in other small estuaries. It was pointed out that this was placing far greater pressure on areas such as the Bemm River, Marlo and Mallacoota. The Gippsland Lakes has an area of 460sqkms whilst Lake Tyers is 25sqkms. It was pointed out that the decline in fishing in the Gippsland Lakes may lead to a decline in other small estuaries, and it was stated that this pressure is already being evidenced in these smaller estuaries. Today few angling clubs visit the Gippsland Lakes, and angling club numbers have also dropped. Example Nicholson Angling Club a decade ago had over 300 members today it has 80 and the same trend applies to other angling clubs. This is really the reverse of the aims of the Target One Million Program

**Closure of 2kms of the Silt Jetties Road-** The current issue of the future closure of the final 2kms of the silt jetties road to vehicular traffic and the provision of a 2 kilometre walking and bike track was placed before the Minister. Her support was sought to achieve an outcome that would allow access to anglers to this area of the Mitchell River. The future closure to vehicle traffic would mean that elderly and handicapped anglers in particular would have this area of the Mitchell river closed to them but anglers generally would be denied access. **This seems totally against the spirit of the Target One Million project**, and hopefully this view will be brought to the attention of Minister Neville, the Minister responsible for the closure. It was also pointed out to Minister Pulford that anglers wanted **this section of the silt jetties preserved and maintained for all members of the public rather than closed off to the public.**

#### **Editors Comment**



This meeting provided the chance for a most valuable discussion with the Minister responsible for Fisheries, and we found her to be enthusiastic for her role and willing to listen and question matters of importance to recreational anglers. This Minister had an hour or two in the early morning fishing Lake Tyers where she caught a nice flathead, and she had flown over the silt jetties coming to east Gippsland so she knew immediately what we were talking about when discussing associated issues. I think anglers are very lucky to have Craig Ingram, with his diverse fishing background and experience Coordinator of the Target One Million Project, undertaking responsibility for the recommendations to be made to the Victorian Parliament on the protection of spawning fish at the mouth of rivers. I would just point out that in ten years of producing this newsletter I never had the opportunity of meeting the previous Minister Peter Walsh or discussing any issues associated with recreational angling with him. In four years, we were not able to advance the protection of spawning fish at the mouth of rivers even though it was a commitment of the previous government.

I wish to express my thanks to the Minister and Craig Ingram for their approach to understanding the problems facing recreational angling in the Gippsland Lakes. I presented Minister Jaala Pulford with a copy of a book I wrote in 2005 entitled, **“The Challenge to Save a Fighting Fish- The Black Bream of the Gippsland Lakes.”**

This book was sponsored by the [Twin Rivers Business and Tourism Association](#), who in 2005, with the decline in Gippsland Lakes recreational fishing were facing declining tourism and motel occupancy rates. Finally, in any discussion of fishing in the Gippsland Lakes it should not be forgotten that, according to a study by Ernst and Young, recreational angling in East Gippsland contributes \$381 million to the Victorian economy. The landed value of the harvest of commercial fishing in the Gippsland Lakes is approximately \$1.1 million annually according to Fisheries Victoria's "Overview of the Gippsland Lakes Fishery."

## **Now it's Up to You This is Important Have Your Say On Netting of Gippsland's River Mouths**

Fisheries Victoria is now consulting stakeholders about how best to deliver the Andrews Government's commitment to ban commercial netting at the mouth of rivers in the Gippsland Lakes. Minister Jaala Pulford said in Lakes Entrance (17<sup>th</sup> Feb.) "commercial netting at the mouth of rivers flowing into the Gippsland Lakes has been a contentious issue for many years and is one we are committed to solving."

Public consultation will be led by Craig Ingram, Coordinator of the Target one Million Plan, and he will report to the Victorian State Parliament on August 26<sup>th</sup> with recommendations to deliver this election commitment.

**Now if you have some Ideas make a Submission and Send it to**

Craig Ingram at- [craig.ingram@ecodev.vic.go.au](mailto:craig.ingram@ecodev.vic.go.au)

**By the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2016**

**OR write to Craig at- PO Box 4509 Melbourne Vic. 3001**



**Now this is a chance for all anglers to have a say. We have seen nets at the mouths of rivers taking tons of bream in flood events, and at other times taking fish as they seek to enter rivers to spawn. We are seeing increasing numbers of perch and bass taken in nets at the mouth of rivers, and these bass have been largely stocked fish paid for with angler licence fees.**

**Every Gippsland Angling Club should have a submission to Craig Ingram, and every angler should have a personal submission.**

**Don't delay; this is too important to anglers.**

### **The Current Regulation**

The current regulation states the licence holder must not use commercial fishing equipment within a distance of 400 metres from any part of the mouth of any river flowing into the Gippsland Lakes or Tom Roberts Creek, Toms Creek, Salt Creek or Maringa Creek. This also includes the waters of Jones Bay which lie within a radius of 400 metres from any such channel or cuts which join the river and Jones Bay. The commercial licence holder if working alone may use up to 1300 metres of mesh net, and if operating with assistance 2,200 metres of mesh nets.

### **Port Phillip and Corio Buyback a Success**

#### **Please Read this Important News**

The first results of the buyback of licences has been announced, and the result supports the Andrews Government's plan to phase out commercial netting in Port Phillip and Corio Bays. This buyback was planned to take place over 8 years however, **33 of the 43 netting licences** will be permanently removed this year along with 73% of the commercial fishing effort. This could happen by the first of April.





*Photo of a nice snapper. Anglers in PPB will be hoping for fish like these.*

Dallas D'Silva, General Manager of VRFish stated, **“It’s an enormous achievement and means better fishing for the recreational fishing community in Victoria’s largest fishery Port Phillip Bay which is worth more than \$1.3 billion to Victoria’s economy each year.”**

This was the first round of licence buyback results and according to Dallas D'Silva, it far exceeded expectations as commercial fishermen wanted to be part of this well structured buyback.

Source- The material in this item came from the VRFish February Newsletter

### **Editor**

Recreational anglers must wonder why ten commercial fishermen of the Gippsland Lakes are not given similar buyback offers to those fishing Port Phillip and Corio Bays. It has been evident for a number of years that some of these commercial fishermen have wanted a buyback offer, and had approached local member Tim Bull MP to see if he could expedite a buyback however, the Coalition chose to take no action on a buyback. We have also seen a local commercial fisherman put his licence and equipment on the market for sale. The Government is currently about to look at measures to protect spawning fish at river mouths. With a buyback of the ten commercial fishermen, there would be no netting at river mouths. It would also mean that funding from recreational fishing licences could be used to stock the Gippsland Lakes with a variety of estuary fish

## **Funding in East Gippsland Great News! Bemm River Launching Ramp Approved**

It's happened at last with the Luderick Point Redevelopment to take place, and this includes upgrading the launching ramp. Bemm River anglers and tourists have for many years campaigned for this upgrade given the damage to boats that was being caused by an unsafe launching ramp. This is a major project that will ensure a safe and efficient launching ramp for the many anglers visiting this idyllic spot. Applications for funding of this project were made to the Boating Safety and facilities Program and the Bemm River project was successful in obtaining \$313,000 towards the project with the East Gippsland Shire adding to the project by contributing \$187,000 to the project. This means the Luderick Point project will be a \$500,000 project.



This has been a long wait for this community and Don Cunningham and his local supporters can relax with this project likely to be completed by Christmas.

Don Cunningham, President of the Bemm River Angling Club said, “the angling club is most grateful, as council officers, and councillors are giving this project top priority.”

This project will bring more tourists to Bemm River, which in turn will add to the local economy.

### **Bemm River Fishing Platforms.**

Readers may recall that almost two years ago, (14<sup>th</sup> March 2014) Don Ellis of the Metropolitan Anglers Association suggested to the Recreational Roundtable that fishing platforms should be constructed on the Bemm River for elderly and handicapped anglers to enjoy fishing in this area and for those occasions when the inlet was too rough to access. I had hoped this would have been achieved before now, however Anthony Nelson, the Strategic projects Planner for Gippsland Shire has provided the following hopeful statement. “There are two new fishing platforms and a major upgrade to the existing Dolly’s Garden fishing platform. These are being funded by Fisheries via the ‘Target One Million Fishing Program.’ The Bemm River Angling Club and the Shire are the applicants and Don is signing the grant application form today.(4<sup>th</sup> March) If we

are successful in gaining the grant we would hope to have the platforms installed around the middle of this year. The Shire and the Angling Club will manage the project.”

Thanks to Anthony Nelson for this definitive statement, and for his work on this and other projects. We look forward to this development, which will provide fishing opportunities for the elderly and handicapped, a growing percentage of Gippsland community members.

## **Other East Gippsland Projects Approved**

### **Johnsonville Landing Jetty Upgrade**

A sum of \$246,000 has been allocated to the Gippsland Ports, from the Boating Safety and Facilities Program to replace the wooden jetty at Johnsonville with a jetty from the launching ramp to the concrete jetty to provide additional landing facilities.

### **Nicholson Boat Ramp Upgrade**

A sum of \$148,000 has been allocated to Gippsland ports to improve the Nicholson Boat ramp and jetty.

### **Transient Jetty Paynesville**

A sum of \$304,000 has been allocated to Gippsland ports to construct a transient jetty on McMillan Straits.

### **Lake King Destination Jetty**

The destination jetty on Lake King, Metung is to receive an upgrade valued at \$204,000 with funds allocated to Gippsland Ports.

### **Mallacoota Main Wharf**

The ramp associated with the main wharf will have an access jetty built at a cost of \$40,000 plus a contribution from the East Gippsland Shire of \$15,000 making this a \$55,000 project

As well as the above the Australian Volunteer Coastguard was allocated \$301,760 to replace the Paynesville Search and rescue craft, whilst the Australian Volunteer Coastguard received \$62,132 to replace the motors on the Lakes Entrance Search and rescue boat.

## **Kingfish in the Gippsland Lakes?**

I have had half a dozen reports of a small school of Kingfish in the Gippsland Lakes with several being caught in Bancroft Bay and one about 12lbs in the Paynesville area.

These reports started on a visit to my dentist who had the pervious weekend been out with a friend in Bancroft Bay following up a report on the Kingfish. They actually saw a school of Kingfish hitting bait fish off the Metung marina but despite trying they had no hook ups. Actually this entry of Kingfish was to be expected with the deepening of the entrance and the increasing salinity of the Gippsland Lakes.



This is not a new feature of the lakes with the artificial opening of the lakes in 1889 allegedly leading to, ‘sea fish swarming into the lakes’ according to Peter Synan in his book Highways of Water. Catches of snapper to 8lbs were recorded in the Nungurner area whilst salmon entered the lake system in massive schools at this time. This year reports indicate the large numbers of King George whiting entering the Gippsland Lakes and it has been reported that over eight tonnes of this species were removed in commercial nets. This may indicate the changing nature of the Gippsland Lakes, from a brackish lagoon to a marine estuary.

The yellowtail Kingfish is described as a “beautiful powerful fish, which has a large deeply forked tail.” It can grow to 2 metres and 50kgs and range from Shark Bay in Western Australia through to central Queensland. It is often found off the Victorian Coast and at the Heads in Port Phillip Bay. By the way, Craig Ingram, Coordinator of the Target One Million Program, is a keen Kingfish angler often chasing this species off Marlo. Of another report, I had a phone call from long time reader John Delzoppo, a former member of the Victorian Parliament, who whilst having a break in Metung decided to spend an hour or so fishing at Shaving point. He used live prawn on a line without a sinker, just casting and letting the bait settle. On this venture, he caught a couple of estuary perch around the 30cms size. Now I haven’t heard of or seen any estuary perch caught in this area. I would be interested in the experience of other anglers. I had a ring from Alec Milledge, also a long time reader of this newsletter. Alec lives on Shaving Point and fishes from his jetty, which faces Bancroft Bay. Alec reported he had caught his first flathead in the last six months fishing soft plastics from his jetty, and it was a small 35cm dusky. On cleaning this fish, he

discovered the flesh was tea coloured, and so he is seeking Fisheries advice as to the cause of this discolouration. This catch of one flathead in the last six months provides added evidence to the current tragic state of dusky flathead fishing in the Gippsland lakes.

## A Developing East Coast Fishery Under Threat

Dallas D'Silva, General Manager of VRFish the recreational fishing peak body in Victoria is calling on the Geelong Star to stay away from the rapidly developing game fishery for striped and blue marlin off **the East Gippsland coast.**

In 2015, VRFish worked closely with the Australian Recreational Fishing Foundation, and the Game fishing Association of Victoria to submit a proposal that addressed the concerns of Australia's recreational fishers at the size of the commercial operation of the Geelong Star and its probable effects on the developing game fishery of the East Coast. The wishes of the bodies representing recreational anglers were rejected by the Geelong Star and Dallas reports "as of last week and to the great disappointment of recreational anglers this large vessel was seen alongside recreational game fishing boats on the South Coast of NSW. This is a fishing industry controlled by the Commonwealth.( Photo supplied by VRFish)



**Dallas D'Silva added "with warm waters off the East Coast of Victoria over the next two months, Victorian Fishers are gearing up to chase blue and striped marlin out of Lakes Entrance and Mallacoota."**



The game fishery is in its infancy in Lakes Entrance but has enormous potential as was evidenced in 2015 by some of the outstanding marlin catches taken from charter boats.

The Geelong Star is a 95 metre trawler that targets small pelagic fish which just happen to be a major source of food for the game fish that inhabit our coast with the warm currents. Already some rural communities are benefiting from the game fisheries on their doorstep, and no better example exists than Portland where the blue fin tuna fishery is estimated to provide an economic boost to the community of around \$9 million per annum.

Of great concern to the environmental community has been the effects of this type of trawl on birds and mammals. The Geelong Star has been in recent weeks withdrawn from operations because of the death of a number albatrosses caught in the massive nets as well as 12 fur seals and 9 dolphins over the last three operations and in recent weeks its net also snagged a large whale shark. The Geelong Star is currently being monitored 24 hours per day but it still comes into areas where game fishing has potential to

support rural communities.

VRFish chairman Rob Loates has stated " Fishing tourism in regional towns would suffer if the small Pelagic Fishery Industry did not listen to the legitimate concerns of recreational fishers."

VRFish has provided a response to the Senate Inquiry and will continue to work closely with the Australian Recreational Fishing Foundation on this important issue into the future. (Photo of Geelong Star, right)



## Items in Brief

### Don Cunningham's Bemm River Fishing Report 5/3/016



Bemm River has fished well this week, with fresh and live prawn attracting good quality fish. The lake has risen and the water is too high to pump sandworm. Many visitors have reported fair catches of flathead, most coming from the channel. I have had good success using wriggler type plastics for bream, but fish over a kilo have been very scarce. Small tailor are showing up in numbers and can be a pest. Our recent fishing competition against Stratford saw good bags of bream, however the size of the fish was down on recent years. The heaviest bream weighed in by John Pederson to retain the shield for Bemm weighed in at 874 gms

Photo supplied by D Cunningham showing Don presenting shield to John Pederson.

### Amateur Fishers in a Legal Fight

It was reported in the Australian of Monday Feb22nd that a company Port Bay Scallops bought a licence for \$180,000 that allowed him to harvest by hand 12 tonnes of scallops per annum. Now due to a loophole in his contract the company is seeking to raise its catch to 750 tonnes that would be worth \$13 million per annum to this company. The matter is now before the Supreme Court with amateur anglers seeking to have the original contract maintained. Nearly a decade ago thousands of anglers marched on Parliament House seeking the Government to take action to protect the scallop beds in Port Phillip Bay. This gathering of anglers inspired the Kennett Government to ban dredging for scallops in Port Phillip Bay.

Celebrity restaurateur Neil Perry is supporting the actions of this company. Recreational anglers are arguing that this scale of scallop harvesting would jeopardise the booming snapper fishery of Port Phillip Bay. VRFish is said to be supporting the initial contract but opposing the expanded quota sought by this company. It is said in this article that the Chief Executive of Port Phillip Bay Scallops is Belinda Wilson, who also happens to be Deputy President of the Law Institute of Victoria. Jaala Pulford Agriculture Minister is quoted as saying the Government wanted to support recreational fishing in Port Phillip Bay while allowing a sustainable longline snapper fishery and a 12 tonne boutique scallop fishery.

### Report On Shellfish Reefs

Whilst anglers are attempting to protect the scallop beds of Port Phillip Bay from a company seeking to profit from the harvesting of one type of native shellfish, other recreational anglers and community members are attempting to restore the denuded shellfish reefs of Port Phillip Bay and Cori Bays with great success. The privately funded Nature Conservancy is working at Wilson's Spit in Corio Bay building a limestone shellfish reef. These reefs were once common around the Australian coast but were almost wiped out after European settlement.

These reefs will improve the water quality of both Port Phillip and Corio Bays. The Trust for Nature Conservancy hopes to double its \$8 million commitment to this project and hopes the depleted oyster reefs across Australia can recover. Former Geelong Football Club President Frank Costa is backing this development.

The Trust for Nature Conservancy Director Rich Gilmore recently was quoted as saying, "when you consider a single oyster can filter a bathtub of water every single day, you start to comprehend the potential filtration power of having millions of oysters growing on a reef,"

“Geelong Region aquafarmers have supplied about 8500 live oysters and 3 tonnes of mussels for the trial, whilst two other sites have been earmarked in Port Phillip Bay.”

The two photos from the Geelong Advertiser show Simon Branigan of Nature Conservancy diving for Oysters and holding up a line of oysters



Readers might recall the report of the two poachers caught removing oysters (1100) and mussels (20 Litres) from the rocks at Kalimna. (See Issue 98). Perhaps some consideration might be given to the development of shellfish reefs in the Gippsland Lakes to act as a living filter on water quality.

## Program for Hatchery Bred Flathead Fingerlings

I recently had a letter from Dr Brett Ingram Senior Scientist with Fisheries Victoria seeking support for Recreation Licence Fee funding for a research project to determine the feasibility of establishing a program for the stocking of hatchery bred flathead in selected coastal bays and inlets in Victoria. Already flathead stocking has been undertaken in other states and part of this project will include reviewing this process in other states.

Given the current situation of flathead stocks in the Gippsland Lakes, I had no hesitation in writing a supporting letter for this program hopefully with emphasis on the dusky flathead in the Gippsland Lakes and estuaries.

Anglers would be aware that the commercial catch of dusky flathead in the Gippsland Lakes has dropped from 48 tonnes in 2005/6 to 7-8 tonnes today. This is a dramatic decline in a fish that is identified with the Gippsland estuaries, and it is also regarded as the largest growing flathead of the 30 species in Australia with it growing to 10 kgs and 150cms in length. It's habitat extending from Mackay in Queensland to Wilson's Promontory in Victoria.

Today it is quite rare to catch a flathead in the Gippsland Lakes much less a large fish. Anglers in recent years, concerned at the declining numbers of dusky flathead worked with Fisheries Victoria to have a slot size of 30-55cms in an effort to protect the large breeding females. Unfortunately, this slot size was not applied to the ten commercial fishermen who net the Gippsland Lakes, and this may be a contributing factor in the decline of this species in the Gippsland Lakes.

**Fisheries Victoria in an Overview of the Gippsland Lakes Fishery notes “The Status of Australian Fish Stocks report 2014” lists commercial and recreational fishing for dusky flathead and tailor as sustainable in Victoria.** I think most anglers who spend time fishing the Gippsland Lakes would find this statement has little relevance to the current reality regarding dusky flathead numbers in the Gippsland Lakes. Of course the old problem of stocking fingerlings in the Gippsland Lakes funded by recreational anglers through their licence fees, which is quite possible, but unlikely whilst commercial netting continues to remove these fish.

In 2006, Minister Cameron, Fisheries Minister in the Labour Government of the day, released over 20,000 black bream fingerlings raised by Fisheries Victoria into the Gippsland Lakes in a publicity event to show stocking was a possibility in the Gippsland Lakes. And of course, Fisheries Victoria has had a massive bass stocking in the rivers that flow into the Gippsland Lakes.






This TAFE facility on Bullock Island, Lakes Entrance could well be used for such a venture as it has previously been used to breed black bream and bass fingerlings.

## Mitchell River Silt Jetty Closure Still an Issue

In recent weeks, the proposed closure of 2kms of the Mitchell River Silt Jetties to anglers has been an issue that was front page on two issues of the Bairnsdale Advertiser, and was the subject of four letters published in the paper. The issue was also discussed with Minister Jaala Pulford and it featured on the ABC morning program. Recreational anglers have had no discussions with Parks Victoria and yet anglers are the main group of users of the end two kilometres of the Silt Jetties that it proposes to close.

It does seem that the major proponents of this closure are Parks Victoria. At the second Stakeholder meeting to discuss the so called "Mitchell River Silt jetties Protection and Enhancement Project" there were ten public representatives and 6 members of Parks Victoria which is hardly a cross section of users of the silt jetties. (The minutes of the first stakeholder meeting did not indicate who attended.) This second meeting was held on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 2014 but it was not until almost a year later on the 30<sup>th</sup> October 2015 that Minister Neville announced the restoration work to be undertaken. In this period, anglers have had no communication, and even after Ministers Neville's announcement, no attempt was made to communicate with anglers.

The closure of 2kms of the silt jetties to anglers will continue to be an issue as it specifically excludes the **elderly and handicapped** anglers from one of the best fishing areas on the Mitchell River.

Can we afford to lose this? 

Anglers have made it abundantly clear that they want the last two kms of the Silt Jetties protected but not at the expense of the older members of the community. It is firmly believed that other alternatives to protect this area, which has been neglected by Parks Vic, should be examined and an alternate proposal put forward rather than closing the final two kms of this heritage landscape to vehicular traffic.

In recent years I've come to know numbers of anglers, who on reaching eighty or thereabout have sold their boats as they did not feel safe, mainly boarding and leaving their boats. These chaps and their wives look forward to fishing off the riverbanks. Most need to have vehicle access to their fishing spot to transport gear and chairs etc. The closure of vehicular traffic on this section of the Mitchell River Silt Jetties is going to mean these anglers will no longer be able to access this fishing area. **This action seems totally opposed to the Target One Million Project and getting anglers and the public to engage in fishing as a healthy hobby.**

I have been informed that bait suppliers are undertaking a petition opposing the closure of the final 2 kms of the Silt Jetties, and I would hope every local angling club will become active on this issue,

**Just remember once it is closed it is gone forever for anglers and particularly for the aged and elderly.**



## Tracks into Lake Tyers.



Readers may recall reports of inspections of tracks into Lake Tyers in March 2011 with Parks Victoria staff ( Issue 40) including the regional Manager and chief ranger. This inspection was organised by John Harrison and I was involved in having an assessment of the tragic state of tracks with John prior to this visit. In 2012, a party of fisheries personnel including Travis Dowling at that time Assistant Chief Executive of Fisheries Victoria, and Tim Bull the local MP.



It was agreed the tracks were in a very poor state and many tracks were in an unsafe condition. The problem was accessing funding to maintain the tracks, and I doubt any maintenance has taken place in the interim. These tracks are clearly mapped and provide access largely on the east side of Lake Tyers.



Concern at the state of tracks originally came to our attention when Parks Victoria were found to be placing large boulders on the tracks to stop access of tourists and anglers rather than attempt to maintain the tracks given maintenance costs.

In the last few days I've managed to see a letter from Parks Victoria, containing a list of tracks presented to Fisheries for upgrade and seeking funding from Fisheries to carry out this upgrade. The letter says the tracks

have been identified by Parks Victoria, local fisheries officers and recreational fishers and seeks support from the Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club to proceed with funding.

Nine tracks have been named in this letter but surprisingly the track into Crystal bay has been ignored. This is a beautiful spot that can provide good fishing at times, and already has picnic tables and access steps cut down to the estuary. Given the nature of this spot, I must say I worry about Parks approach to obtaining information from stakeholders as a basis for decision making.

*Photo right, shows the state of the track into Crystal Bay*



I have another concern and that involves the long term maintenance of these tracks. The tracks may be redeveloped back to a standard that allow safe access, however will Parks have the capacity and funding to maintain these tracks. This is an issue that does not seem to have been considered in the letter I have seen, but it is an important issue. It is good that after four years and numerous articles and ongoing discussion the issue of the Tracks into Lake Tyers is being considered and I look forward to detailed information on this project.

### **Lake Tyers Tracks listed for work**

Gibbs Beach Track, Trident Arm, Pettmans Road, Cherry Tree Track, Burnt Bridge West Track, Morgan's Landing/ ironbark, Cameron's Arm 1, Cameron's Arm 2. Pile Bay track.

## Gippsland Lakes Coordinating Committee

This new look committee is made up of 5 community members and 5 public sector agency members with the Chair of the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, Angus Hume, and the Chair of the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority Dr Peter Veenker as co-chairmen. There are 6 male members of this committee and 6 female members, which is current Government policy. The interesting appointment for recreational anglers is that of commercial fisherman Arthur Allen who undoubtedly will represent the interests of the ten commercial fishers. What is hard to fathom is who will similarly represent the interests of the hundreds of recreational anglers who fish the Gippsland Lakes and the many businesses dependent on recreational fishing.

I am aware that VRFish have shown interest in this seeming imbalance and have written to Minister Neville on behalf of recreational anglers with no success. Mr Allan was also a member of the Ministerial Advisory Committee that preceded the formation of the Coordinating Committee of the Gippsland Lakes. This appointment becomes even stranger when it is realised that recreational fishing in East Gippsland contributes

around \$380 million per annum to the Victorian economy whilst commercial netting in the Gippsland Lakes contributes around \$1 million. Gippsland is second only to the Port Phillip region in terms of economic contribution across Victoria. Finally commercial fishermen decided in 2005 that they would boycott meetings that involved recreational anglers and this included stock and habitat Assessment Meetings to discuss matters associated with the Gippsland Lakes fisheries. This boycott has remained in force for the last eleven years. These facts would seem to have been ignored by the Minister in her appointments to this committee.

## Water Inflow to the Gippsland Lakes

A week or two ago well known local angler John Murray rang and we had a bit of a yarn about current conditions in the Gippsland Lakes for fishing. John made the point that while many anglers are talking about the increased salinity in the lakes he believes it is the lack of water from streams that inflow into the Gippsland Lakes that is a major cause of current problems, including the increased salinity and I had to agree with him. On average nearly 20% of stream flows are extracted upstream, with most extraction coming from the Latrobe system, and it is suggested that climate change may account for another 34%, which leaves very little water flowing into the lake system. The permanent entrance to the sea with its increased depths is increasing salinity and the combination of decreased inflows and the permanent entrance to the sea has resulted in increased salinities throughout the lake system. The Gippsland Lakes in recent decades has changed from a freshwater brackish system to an estuarine system and these changes are impacting on vegetation, birds, fish, and submerged aquatic plants.

This report I have quoted from suggests “there is justification to maintain the existing water caps on the catchments of the Gippsland Lakes given the very high values of the lake system and their demonstrated reliance on freshwater inflows.”

John was correct with his thoughts and freshwater inflows will play an important role in the future of the lakes system. In another paper undertaken by Fisheries Victoria on this topic it was suggested that a percentage of freshwater inflows be protected and set aside for the lake system and that water for the lake system should be a priority in its own right.

Source.. [Understanding the Environmental Water Requirements of the Gippsland Lakes System \(2009\)](#) (East and West Gippsland Catchment Management Authorities.)



### **A New Radio Star Born!!!!!!**

I was listening to the radio the other morning (Friday 4th March) whilst eating my breakfast soon after 6.00am when I realized the dulcet tone of the person describing the joy of fishing Lake Tyers, and to be aware of the large tailor in this estuary was none other than our Chief Executive of Fisheries Victoria, Travis Dowling. He also described how you could catch a whiting or two off the bridges and wharfs in Lakes Entrance. I was really disappointed that I missed the first part of the Dowling Fishing Show. Talk about enthusiasm for the job and at six in the morning!

## Salinity, Seagrass and Black Bream of the Gippsland Lakes

The following is a short overview of the changing situation in the Gippsland Lakes

The 360 square kilometre Gippsland Lakes estuarine system has been largely known for black bream and dusky flathead fisheries, the life cycle of both species occurring within the Gippsland Lakes and river system. In the 1980's the commercial catch of black bream in the Gippsland Lakes was between 200 and 400 tonnes of this species, and accounted for 80% of the Victorian black bream commercial catch. It was suggested that the recreational catch of black bream was at least equal to the commercial catch, and the lake and rivers supported a vibrant recreational fishery and tourism influx involving hundreds of anglers and families from all parts of Victoria. The dusky flathead commercial catch in this same period was 35-65 tonnes per annum, and this species was a sought after species by recreational anglers as fish in excess of 10lbs were a regular catch.. At this time the Gippsland Lakes provided one of the great recreational fisheries in the State of Victoria and a commercial fishery that provided 3-400 tonnes of fish to the Victorian market annually. Today the average annual black bream catch is 30-50 tonnes whilst the dusky flathead annual catch is 8 tonnes. In other words the fishery in the Gippsland Lakes is in dire straits.

All anglers and environmentalists have long realised that salinity and seagrass are most important to the health of the Gippsland Lakes and the living creatures including fish that are part of the lake system. The last major study of seagrass in the Gippsland Lake took place in 1997. The dependence of black bream on seagrass in the Gippsland Lakes was demonstrated in the 1920-50 period when seagrass almost disappeared and the black bream commercial catch dropped from 352 tonnes to just 12 tonnes. In 2008 Dr Jeremy Hindell provided the first of a number of snapshots on the seagrass condition within the Gippsland Lakes, which found that there had been a seagrass decline at 75% of the sites studied, however this provided a snapshot of conditions rather than a definitive study,

Currently a study involving seagrass mapping is being carried out by Fiona Warry of the Arthur Rylah Institute, with aerial photography by Monash University and underwater video and photography being undertaken by personnel from the Arthur Rylah Institute. The team at Arthur Rylah are processing maps and these maps will be made available when the work has been completed.

With the man made artificial entrance to the Gippsland Lakes being deepened the lakes have turned from being a brackish estuary to a marine estuary with the increased salinity. It would now seem necessary to assess the effect of increased salinity on seagrass in the Gippsland Lakes and the effect on black bream spawning in the Gippsland Lakes.

Taken from the 1997 Report on Seagrass in the Gippsland Lakes-

**“Most species utilize the seagrass as both a source of prey species for their young and also for shelter. Seagrass meadows provide a suitable substrate for the deposition of eggs and a habitat for larvae immediately after hatching.”**

Dr Joel Williams in his study “The Secret Lives of Black Bream” has shown black bream are now moving up rivers to spawn due to the increased salinity of the Gippsland Lakes. The lack of any seagrass in the rivers to provide protection to the larvae and small fish would seem to be a problem influencing future black bream stocks in the Gippsland Lakes.

In the publication “Allocation of Fish Resources in Victorian Bays and Inlets” is the statement that Lake King and Lake Victoria have traditionally been the most important nurseries in the Gippsland Lakes. With increased salinity of the Gippsland Lakes this is no longer a statement that bears any relation to reality



The stock assessment of black bream by Fisheries Victoria at Bairnsdale in 2012 suggested that Gippsland Lakes stock of black bream **were stable, although at a lower level of productivity compared to the 1970's and 1980's.**

This assessment has been consistently questioned by recreational anglers with angler catchrates at Twin Rivers fishing competitions around 1 bream per twelve hours fished. Dr Murray MacDonald Fisheries Victoria scientist said in 1997 that “in a study over the past two years over 1200 recreational anglers were interviewed and approximately 60% had not caught a fish.” Added to this was concern at the lack of large fish, which were needed if the stock of black bream were to recover when spawning conditions improved. In 2012 Greg Jenkins manager of the DPI's Fisheries Research branch said that in the case of black bream the salt wedge when formed in estuaries created the interface where black bream larvae and eggs were prevalent. However he said drought conditions during the past decade were similar to those predicted under climate change with lower than normal freshwater flows forcing the species further upstream in search of lower salinities for favourable spawning conditions. **This will contribute to population decline in areas such as the Gippsland Lakes-Victoria's most important recreational bream fishery.** This decline is currently happening in the Gippsland Lakes.

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**Good Health and Good fishing**