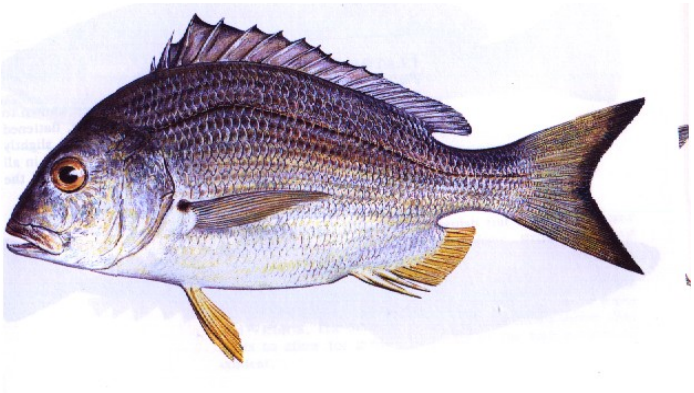

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Around the Jetties No 29

October 2009

"The true fisherman approaches the first day of fishing with
all the sense of wonder and awe of a child approaching Christmas."

Robert Traver
Trout Madness (1960)

Editorial

A variety of issues are canvassed in this months Around the Jetties. I would draw reader's attention to the new challenges facing the Gippsland Lakes with the European Green Shore Crab. This matter has received no publicity, but would seem to pose problems for the future. In recent weeks we have had gale force South Westerly winds, but there has been no seagrass washed onto the shore at Metung. A couple of years ago the shore would be covered with seagrass that had been washed up after a similar blow. This simple layman's test would seem to indicate that our seagrass meadows are sparse and are a matter for continuing concern and of course this will affect fish stocks in the longer period. Recreational anglers have faced declining fish stocks in recent years in particular, but little comment has been made on the dramatic collapse of the commercial bait industry, and this affects most anglers, and certainly visitors to this area.

Gippsland Lakes Bait Industry

In recent weeks it has become evident that the Gippsland Lakes commercial bait industry is in great difficulty. At the moment there is no shell, sandworm, spider crab or shrimp regularly available and on sale at bait outlets and it seems the only bait regularly available is now Green European Shore Crab. Due to this shortage by simple economics it has meant massive increases in bait costs for recreational anglers. Most boxes of bait are now in the $7-8 range. I had a reader purchase a box of the European crabs recently and found he had 8 crabs in the box. Each crab could be cut into 4 baits, this meant each bait used cost 25 cents. The bait situation has seen a number of licensed commercial bait fishermen no longer operating due to the scarcity of bait resources, and a large part of this can be traced to the current condition of the lakes and the lack of seagrass. This problem has had almost no publicity, and perhaps Fisheries Victoria should be conducting an in depth investigation of the Gippsland Lakes bait industry. Bait from the Gippsland Lakes also affects recreational fishing in Lake Tyers and the Marlo area and has the potential to impact on tourism over a wide area.

"Gippsland Lakes on the Mend?"

The above was a heading on the front page of the Bairnsdale Advertiser of the 27th of July 2009. This was based on a scientific snapshot which was a short report commissioned by the Gippsland Lakes and Catchment Taskforce. Chairman of the Taskforce Professor Barry Hart went so far as to say, "the fish are breeding, the seagrass at a number of significant sites has improved in abundance, and the levels of algae in the water have declined" This was

the second snapshot research project and it compares changes that have taken place from the first short project that took place in September 2008. This is therefore a comparison of the lakes taken seven months after the first snapshot. The snapshot method is to provide a quick report for the Gippsland Lakes Taskforce without a full examination of either fish stocks or the current status of seagrass. The report was prepared by Dr Jeremy Hindell and Fiona Warry of the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research and was entitled "Fish assemblages and seagrass condition of the Gippsland Lakes."

Fish Assemblages

"Over the past two years Hindell and colleagues have developed and refined a method of sampling fish and prawns throughout the Gippsland Lake." The initial results were achieved using a small otter trawl. In the first "snapshot" sampling in September 2008, the trawl was used to sample 23 sites at a depth of around 2 metres. Fish catches were very low in September 2008, and catches of fish were lower in the lake than in the rivers. It was felt that the otter trawl was not effective in shallow water because of boat disturbance so it was decided to use a beach seine net in the second sampling in April 2009 and this was used on the shallow edges of the lake whilst continuing to use the otter trawl in the deeper waters. It was clear the seine net was more effective in the shallow seagrass dominated environments of the edges of the Gippsland Lakes. For all subsequent sampling the beach seine was used. As a result the seine was classed as unsuitable in areas with snags, and the sampling focussed on sites with seagrass.
The number of fish sampled was greater in April 2009 than in September 2008 and an example of the increase is black bream, which numbered 41 in 2008, and 61 in April 2009. Luderick were another species that were not recorded in 2008 but numbered 42 in 2009.

Seagrass Condition

The first sampling of seagrass for this study was taken in September 2008 with a second sampling in April 2009. Since 1997 the seagrass density at 23 of 30 sites appeared to have declined. Seagrass had increased between the April 2008 and September 2009 samplings at 50% of sampled sites whilst 39% of the sampled sites showed no change. Whilst some sites indicated considerable growth in seagrass this was most variable even within a site. Six sites had no visible signs of seagrass.
The Gippsland Lakes were last mapped for seagrass in 1997 and it is clear that substantial changes in the distribution of seagrass have taken place since that time. This study suggests that further studies on seagrass should take place every 3-5 years given a suggested 75% decline in seagrass since the 1997 study.
In summary video footage at April 2009 suggested a decline in the amount of seagrass over 60% of broad regions, an increase in 20% and no change within 20%, compared with the study of 1997. It is recommended that future seagrass samplings take place in March/April of each year which would mean that sampling would take place before winter die back and whilst substantial range of fish species are still present in the lakes.

Editor

1.The question arises as to the significance of the fish numbers given they were collected at a different times of the year, and most importantly using different methods of capture. As the report suggests these figures may form a base line for comparisons in the future, but I would suggest the information currently obtained is insufficient to make any firm forecasts on the status of fish stocks in the Gippsland Lakes at this time.
2.It has been suggested that in future studies, the link between seagrass and fish numbers should be examined and this would be most helpful in understanding the effect of seagrass on fish numbers.
3.Of continuing concern is the major loss of seagrass in the Gippsland Lakes since 1997 and the lack of funding for a further extensive study of the current extent of seagrass. The 1997 study may well provide a base line to compare the changes in the extent of seagrass that has taken place in the last twelve years. Perhaps this should be a Government priority?
4. Thanks to Chris Barry of the Gippsland Lakes & Catchment Taskforce for making these papers available and congratulations to the Taskforce for undertaking these studies.

From 1997 Habitat Data Base for Seagrass in the Gippsland Lakes

"Seagrass is a significant marine habitat, it serves as a nursery area for juvenile marine fauna, as well as providing food and shelter. Seagrasses are highly productive and provide a substratum for algae and small animals. Seagrass meadows provide breeding areas for many fish as well as food and protection. Juvenile fish dependent on seagrass within the Gippsland Lakes include mullet tailor bream and flathead."
This was taken from the report on seagrass of 48 pages prepared for Fisheries Victoria in 1997. I am unaware of any comprehensive report on seagrass in the last 12 years that covered the area of the 1997 report.

Gippsland Ports Survey

Gippsland Ports commissioned two surveys of seagrass habitat in the inner channels at Lakes Entrance in April 2007 and February 2008, and found the area covered by seagrass in these channels had decreased by 67%, and there had been a 94% decrease in the area of seagrass in the Inner Channels between April 2007 and February 2009. Source Lakes Entrance Seagrass Monitoring and Marine Habitats 2009-Report to Gippsland Ports.

It would appear that seagrass meadows in the Gippsland Lakes are in poor condition, and if the reports above were combined one would have to have concern at the current seagrass situation when compared with the definitive 1997 survey. The current information would suggest a 60% decline overall and in some areas the picture is far worse. This in turn would suggest a substantial impact on fish in the Gippsland Lakes.

Odd Spot

I saw in a Bairnsdale fish outlet recently sand whiting at $5.99 per kilo. In the same refrigerated cabinet were small fillets of the same sand whiting, however the cost was $25.99. Now this is value adding on a massive scale, however it is hard to imagine filleting these little fish.

An Angler works to Improve Black Bream Numbers

I recently had a telephone call from reader Sid Williams of Mallacoota. Sid has been working for a number of years to get a closed season for black bream in the upper reaches of rivers to provide protection for these fish while spawning. This issue now becomes even more important with evidence that the black bream are now spawning in what seems far greater numbers in the rivers, and this seems particularly so in the Gippsland Lakes where the marine influence is growing in the main lake and the lake waters may now be too saline for successful black bream spawning. Sid was saying he had put his case to Fisheries Victoria, the Minister responsible, and the ombudsman, and he was currently preparing a newspaper article on the issue. In talking to Sid he quoted information from research papers from Fisheries Victoria including work by Dr Murray McDonald going back a number of years to support his case. I think we should all appreciate the work of an angler like Sid Williams who incidentally now happens to be in his nineties, and he continues to work towards the protection and survival of black bream.

1.In November 2008 Sid Williams wrote to the Minister on behalf of the Mallacoota Ratepayers Group seeking closure of waters upstream from Gypsy Point during the black bream-spawning period from August 1st to October 31st. This letter was accompanied by a petition, signed by 830 people seeking protection for black bream in the upper reaches of the estuary.

2.The proposition for a closed season in the upper part of the estuary was also put to the Mallacoota Fisheries Management Plan Steering group charged with preparing a management plan for these waters. (September 2006.) Whilst noting these concerns the steering group stated in its report that closures were not being considered because there was no scientific information to support such a closure. Strangely however they did say that closures and bag limits would be considered when more information on the status of bream stocks is gained from angler's diaries and creel surveys. (Page 26 Mallacoota Inlet Fisheries reserve Management Plan September 2006)

3. It was equally interesting that some anglers raised the same issue of closures to the steering group preparing the Lake Tyers Management Plan. Lake Tyers anglers proposed extra protection for black bream with a closed season in waters upstream of Burnt Bridge in the Toorloo Arm of Lake Tyers. The reply was "this is not currently being considered for the following reasons" and again it was that scientific evidence did not indicate any decline in bream stocks and this response was virtually the same as that provided to Mallacoota anglers.

Editors Comment

It seems somewhat strange that anglers providing submissions to the Management Plan Steering Groups for Mallacoota and Lake Tyers raised the issue of added protection for spawning bream by closures of spawning areas for a couple of months a year. In both cases the Steering Groups noted that such a step to protect spawning black bream was not currently being considered. Perhaps anglers are being more proactive than committees formed by Fisheries Victoria on this issue. I have mentioned before that both the Mallacoota and Lake Tyers Management Plan Steering Committees had a notable lack of local knowledge and no representatives of local angling clubs, yet Parks Victoria, indigenous interests, the local shires, and East Gippsland Catchment Management were represented and charged with advising Fisheries Victoria. Dr Murray MacDonald, Manager of Bays and Inlets represented Fisheries Victoria and provided technical advice whilst VRFish provided a representative who in some cases had little knowledge of fishing conditions in the waters under discussion. I would think there is a case for local anglers being included as part of the steering committee or as advisors of current conditions in the estuaries under discussion, and if this were the case protection of

black bream spawning areas might be considered currently. This matter of closures deserves consideration particularly with the changed conditions in the Gippsland Lakes and also given the knowledge of bream stocks in Mallacoota over the years that an angler like Sid Williams and his committee can provide.

Changes to Silver Trevally Regulations

It was surprising to read that the regulation regarding the minimum size for silver trevally had been reduced from 23cms to 20cms. This took place after two years of submissions and three months after the announcement of new Fisheries Regulations, which set the minimum size for silver trevally at 23cms. VRFish in its submission to the review of Fisheries Regulations indicated that all submissions received requested an increase in the size limit and its submission proposed an increase from 20 to 21cms whilst the regulations when published set the minimum size at 23cms. According to the Acting Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria the increase in minimum size from 20-23cms had an adverse impact on commercial fishers in that silver trevally of 21 and 22cms, which were highly desirable commercially had to be returned to the water. The Acting Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria Mr Hurst in a report in the Victorian Fishing Monthly magazine (Vol 5 No 10) indicated that he had gained the support of commercial and recreational fishers for this change. Naturally the commercial sector would support this change, but I have not seen any information from VRFish on this matter, and they surely would have been the organisation representing recreational anglers. I am concerned that regulations after a long consultative procedure involving commercial and recreational anglers can be overturned without again seeking widespread input from recreational and commercial fishermen and without putting the case for change to the parties to the original regulation. It also concerns me that the basis for change is the availability of a specific size of trevally for commercial fishermen.

In NSW the minimum size limit for silver trevally is 30cms.whilst in 2007/8 the commercial catch of silver trevally in the Gippsland Lakes was a mere 7 tonnes. Silver trevally reach maturity between 18 and 25cms so this reduction in minimum size will mean that many silver trevally will be caught without having the opportunity to spawn. This fish when it reaches 1-4 kgs is one of the best sporting fish in our estuaries for recreational anglers. I have not seen these factors canvassed amongst recreational anglers prior to this swift revision of the previous regulation. Finally the silver Trevally catch of 2007/8 in the Gippsland Lakes yielded $3.57 per kilo to the commercial fishermen. This surely indicates a most uneconomic use of a fish resource

A Trophy Trevally from Lake Tyers 2008 (photo provided by Frank Molito)

#The first notice of this change that I read was in a Fish Fax 251 of 2nd September. I have not heard or read any information on this change from anyone representing recreational anglers.

The Victorian Fishing Monthly for September headed a section as “Silver Lining for Trevally Anglers.” This was listed as Fisheries News and I wonder how many anglers would class this as a “Silver Lining,” and I also ponder whether this item was an official Fisheries Victoria press release.

I raise the question why returning silver trevally under 23cms would have an “ adverse impact” on commercial fishers, given they have to return black bream under 28cms. The fact that small silver trevally “are highly desirable commercially” hardly seems a valid reason for reducing size limits on any species.

Finally does this action create a precedent for further changes in regulations to satisfy commercial interests?

A Disturbing Report

I have had drawn to my attention by several sources the growth of vast numbers of crabs in the Gippsland Lakes, and when I suggest vast numbers I am informed the crabs are in hundreds of thousands. These crabs have been identified as the European Shore Crab or Green Shore Crab. This crab is a native to the Atlantic coast of Europe and northern Africa; but in the last fifty years it has rapidly spread further particularly into North America. The first of this species was documented in Australia in 1900 in Port Phillip Bay, but the species has now spread to all states except the Northern Territory. The crabs have been documented in 11 estuaries on the NSW south coast.

The European green crab can live in a variety of habitats and is often seen on mud flats or amongst rocks or seagrass in protected bays and estuaries. In NSW this crab is regarded as a class 1 noxious fish, and the movement of crabs is strictly regulated. No such steps have been taken in Victoria.

The crab breeds up to three times per year, and females may carry up to 200,000 fertilised eggs underneath her abdomen and the crabs grow to about 8.6 cm or 2.5 inches. These crabs vary in colour from dark green to almost orange.

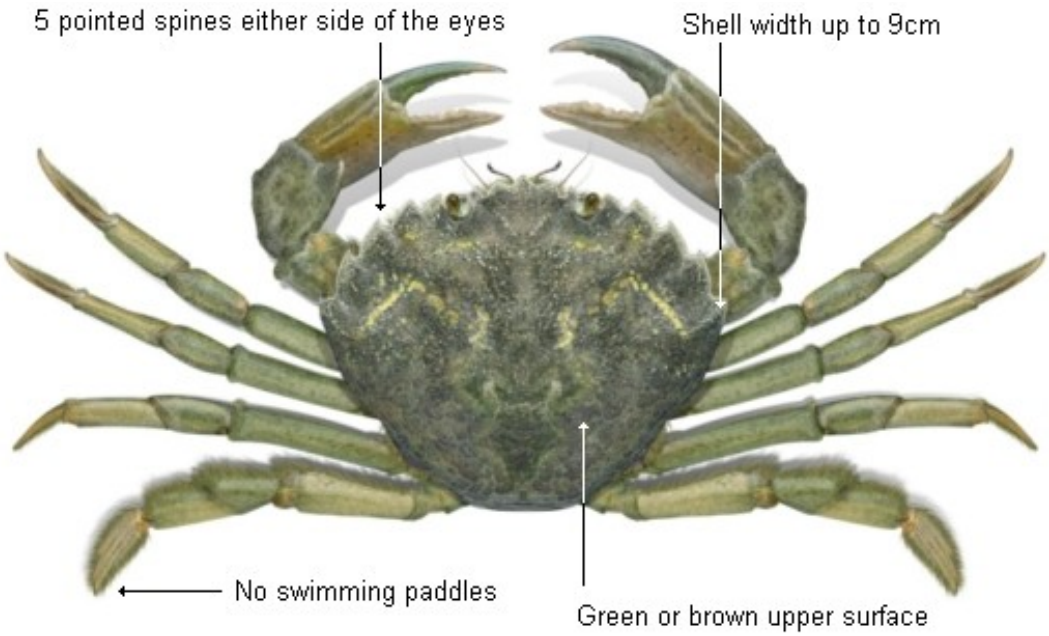


Diagram from NSW Department of Primary Industries Web Site

The Crabs are voracious scavengers and wreak havoc on native bivalve populations. They use their front claws to break open shells of mussel's, barnacles, and bivalves, and they are known to have had an impact on oyster farming. In some cases they have destroyed native fisheries by removing food that would normally be available for scale fish as part of the food chain. The crabs have been noted to have a marked effect, destroying seahorse populations, and it has been suggested by some observers they may have an impact on seagrass although this claim has not been scientifically verified. Overseas this crab is regarded as one of the world's worst marine invaders and has been dubbed the "cockroach of the sea."

The crab has not been declared noxious in Victoria and is harvested by commercial bait fishermen. The crab has not spread west of Melbourne but with the movement of live crab for bait within the state this protected area may not last long. This is a matter that warrants investigation and at the very least information being provided to recreational anglers and the regulation of bait sales of this noxious crab. . The only method of control that I have been able to find is the use of crab traps and given the vast population of this crab in the Gippsland Lakes this method of control would have no effect. Perhaps the European Shore Crab is now a permanent part of the ecology of the Gippsland Lakes.

Editor

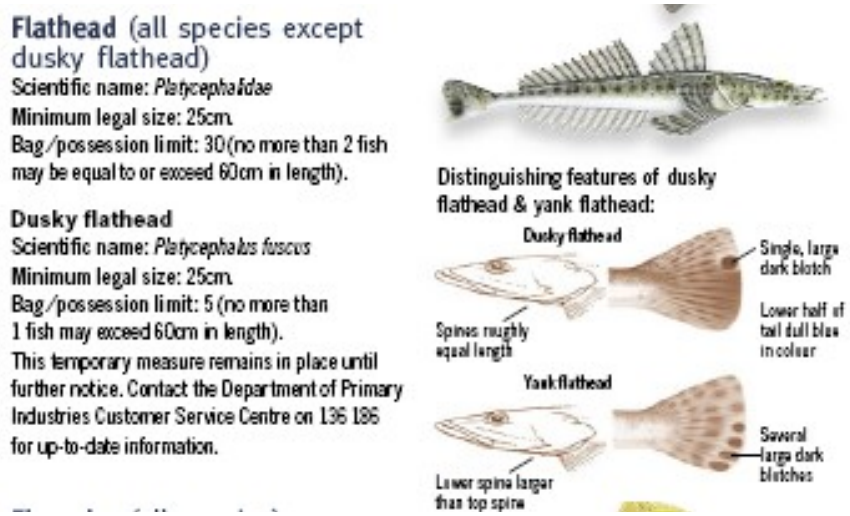
1. When I looked up details of this crab on the Internet I found hundreds of pages covering the European Shore Crab in many countries of the world.
2. I was interested to read that these crabs take a large toll on seahorses in the estuaries. Readers will remember that after the 2007 floods numbers of seahorses in the Gippsland Lakes died because of the influx of fresh water. It now seems that these crabs are making inroads in the remaining seahorse population of the Gippsland Lakes, as well as consuming the variety of crustaceans of the Gippsland Lakes.

Southern Blue Spotted Flathead

I was interested to hear from a knowledgeable local angler a confirmed report that he had caught a number of Yank flathead in the Gippsland Lakes in the last year with the largest fish going over 6lb. Known as the Southern Blue Spotted Flathead, this species is commonly called the yank flathead. The yank flathead has a bag and possession limit of 20 fish whilst the normal flathead taken in the Gippsland Lakes is the Dusky Flathead with a bag limit of five fish and with only one over 60cms. I would be interested in any further reports of catches of the yank flathead by recreational anglers in the Gippsland Lakes.

Identification

This fish is best identified by the white to blue splotches on the back and a row of 3-5 black blotches on the rear of the caudal fin or tail. The base colour varies from sandy to dark brown. The Yank flathead can be confused with the dusky flathead however the distinctive 3-5 tail splotches on the yank and the generally darker colour of the dusky flathead and the fact that the dusky flathead has only a single dark blotch on its tail in provide a key to identification.



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A Snapshot of a Day on Lake Tyers

By Frank Milito

Recently I spoke to Frank Milito, a charter operator on Lake Tyers and was concerned with what he told me, and asked him to write a short report. The following is his report.

"On Tuesday the first of September I departed with a client from the No 2 launching ramp for a days lure fishing targeting catch and release dusky flathead. Our expectations were not high as the water temperature was around 13.8 degrees, which is only a small increase on the average winter water temperature of around 12.5 degrees. We found several good flathead that had woken from their winter slumber. After lunch we decide to fish the Nowa Nowa Arm. Now what was disturbing was that after the Trident Arm we started to notice dead juvenile and mature black bream lying on the bottom. As we moved further up the Now Arm we could see schools of fish spooking on the shallow flats, and it appeared that many of these fish were not well. The condition of a large number of bream was very poor and you could see that a number of these fish had the same health problem that was identified in the previous year, # however on this occasion it appeared that a number of sea mullet were also infected and were unwell. The only good news was that both dusky flathead and luderick appeared unaffected.

To me this is a real concern as we are only now entering the time of year when this copepod infection becomes more active due to increasing water temperatures and salinity. To me it is obvious that regular rainfall is a key factor in protecting black bream stocks in Lake Tyers as the black bream would seem to face major environmental hurdles in the future in these waters. Many anglers are now concerned at the status of black bream stocks and the

effect of the current drought, which may be having a greater impact than many recreational anglers thought possible. Protection and management strategies to protect black bream may have little effect if the area does not have good soaking rains in the near future."

Editor

This was reported in issue 24 (April 2009) when an external parasite was identified as affecting black bream in Lake Tyers. Elevated salinity levels and water temperatures were being investigated as a possible cause for the large number of cocepods (parasites). In some cases this parasite caused blindness in black bream.

Some anglers have expressed concern as the level of Lake Tyers has declined over the winter and since the last breakout on the 26th of June 2007 for the water would appear to be more saline and certainly the lower levels will mean higher summer water temperatures. These are ideal conditions for more cocepod infestations of black bream.

A number of anglers have reported recent fishing mornings on Lake Tyers with hardly a bite. This current experience is very different to the normal experience, and what is concerning is that the poor fishing has been evident for three months or more. Perhaps this may change with recent rains.

According to Senior Fisheries Officer at Lakes Entrance Dick Brumley this report from Frank Milito will be promptly investigated as were the first fish deaths in April of this year.

McLeod's Morass

I recently talked with reader Norm Elliott, of the Bairnsdale Field and Game Association about the current problems facing the Macleods Morass. The Morass is a 550 ha shallow freshwater wetland on the boundary of Bairnsdale in East Gippsland. This is a significant wetland and hosts a variety of wetland birds and is part of the Ramsar Convention. (An International Agreement for the conservation and wise use of wetlands.) In the late 1950's this wetland showed marked signs of degradation with sewerage entering the morass, and then in the seventies the arrival of European Carp in vast numbers added greatly to the problems facing this wetland. In the eighties the water quality was improved with the Environment Protection Authority ensuring a reduction in nutrient and sediment release into the morass, however there has been an increased growth in pest plants due to remaining nutrient levels, with massive areas of cumbungi now dominating the aquatic flora.

The Field and Game Association developed a plan to rid the Morass of carp, and with hundreds of hours of voluntary work and thousands of dollars of locally raised funds carp gates were constructed to stop the movement of carp into the morass, and this was found to be successful, and was an example to many other groups including interstate interests who were seeking to control carp.

In recent times the Parks Victoria has removed the gates, and carp have been able to return and despite many requests the problem of cumbungi has not been addressed. In other words the state of Macleods Morass has deteriorated and much of the good work undertaken by volunteers now seems to be wasted due to lack of support of responsible authorities. The responsible authority is now Parks Victoria. This project was a great achievement of self-help and voluntary labour, and again demonstrated what sportsmen could achieve with enthusiasm and dedication. Swans returned to the Morass and in 1972 the first Ibis nested at the Morass, and Norm indicated in one year 3000 Ibis nested in the area. For anglers the control of carp was a major achievement, but according to Norm all this now seems at risk, and the Morass is in danger of returning to a cumbungi infested area, and a breeding ground for European Carp. These carp will ultimately infest the rivers entering the lakes in ever-greater numbers. According to Norm Elliott it is urgent that what has been achieved at McLeod's Morass is not lost and that Parks Victoria joins with the local Field and Game group to develop a unified approach to restoring McLeod's Morass to its former health which includes control of weeds and return of the gates to its designed function namely to control the movement of carp into the Morass. Thanks to Norm Elliot for this outline and the photographs

Sea Run Trout

Some anglers do not realise that sea run trout have in the past been caught downstream of the Mitchell River Highway Bridge and downstream of the Bruthen Road Bridge on the Tambo River and the closed trout season does still not apply to these waters. There is a 5 fish bag limit for trout of which no more than 2 fish may exceed 35cms. Around the Victorian coast are a number of specified rivers that contain populations of sea run brown trout and no

closed season applies. These waters are listed in the angler's handbook. A reader has informed me that in the thirties an 18lb sea run trout was caught in the Mitchell River below Shadoof Lodge.
When I asked Trevor Stow local business man and trout fishing writer about sea run trout he suggested that sea run trout no longer exist in our local rivers, and this is due to changing water conditions. He said that originally trout entered the lower Mitchell and Tambo in August and September to feed on the spawning smelt, and a number were caught in the commercial nets at the mouth of rivers however they are no longer taken in commercial nets nor by recreational anglers. It would seem we have an open season for sea run trout when all other rivers are closed, but changing conditions mean we no longer have sea run trout in the Mitchell and Tambo Rivers as they were years ago.
I would be interested if any other readers could add any further information on this interesting change that seems to have taken place, and thanks to Trevor Stow for the current information. The Fishing Monthly magazine for this month had several articles on sea run trout in Tasmanian rivers and estuaries and in all cases large schools of smelt were the attraction for these trout.

Recreational Fishing and Trailer Boat Owners Advocacy and Support Group

I have received a document from the above group setting out in clear form a policy statement on this group that is supported by 33 stakeholders. The group's coordinator is Bob Pearce who was formerly Chairman of VRFish, but who now is devoting his time and energy to this new group. The group has developed policies for improving boat launching infrastructure and boating safety, but the policies also extend to fish stocking and habitat as well as the use of anglers licence fees and poses questions as to whether licence fees should be used to meet the salaries of Fisheries Officers. # Any anglers or boat owners can obtain a copy of this policy issues paper at no cost, and it provides interesting reading and sets out questions that should be examined and ultimately asked by anglers and boat owners.

Write to

Mr Bob Pearce
Recreational Fishing and Boating Policies Issues
4 Cheviot Close
Wantirna Vic 3152
Or **Email** -bobpearce@optusnet.com.au

Editor

This publication has commented on the use of anglers licence fees to pay the salaries of Fisheries Officers. This was introduced with the introduction of licence fees and has now almost automatically become part of Fisheries budget and does not seem to be questioned. VRFish initially supported this use of licence fees. The total receipts from Angling Licence fees was $4.8m in 2007/2008 and $1.175m of that was used to pay salaries of 10 fisheries officers or as they are now called "Field Officers." This means that 25% of licence fees are used to pay salaries of Fisheries Officers, and there seems to be little questioning of this allocation by anglers generally.

September Postscript

On the 4th of October I talked to a young lady who had been conducting a creel survey for Fisheries Victoria at the No 2 ramp at Lake Tyers. She had undertaken this survey working 4 days per month over a 4-month period (16 days of survey). This period took in the school holidays and weekend fishing activities. The startling result was that in this period she had seen no more than 20 bream brought into the jetty and ramp. Actually local recreational anglers could have supplied the same information from their recent fishing experience at Lake Tyers. Perhaps such information may encourage Steering Committees involved in developing Management Plans in the future to at least give consideration to a closed season for black bream in spawning waters. The current fishing in Lake Tyers according to many experienced anglers is the worst in years and seems to affect all species.

Meeting with East Gippsland Shire

Following recent publicity on fishing platforms in local rivers, a meeting has been arranged on the 13th of October with two representatives of the East Gippsland Shire to discuss access to fishing platforms by handicapped persons. I will report on this meeting in the next issue. This matter was raised in "Around the Jetties" in May 2008 following the matter being brought to our attention by the late Don Jolley AIM himself a wheelchair angler.

Wattle Bloom Bream

Spring Time on the Tambo (Taken from the Fishing World Magazine June 1987)

What of the Future?

Although the Gippsland Lakes area continues to produce incredible amounts of bream each year, pressure on stocks is always increasing. One of the dramatic influences acting upon the long-term health of the Gippsland Lakes is the increasing salinity within the system. As a result of the increased salinity brought about by opening Lakes Entrance has been the need for the bream to seek out rivers, and in many cases to run well up them in order to spawn. This concentration of bream in the upper reaches at spawning time increases their vulnerability to fishing pressure. In a little under two hours one busy Sunday evening in late August we witnessed the cleaning of at least 1000 bream at one ramp on the Tambo. Average catch per boat averaged about 40 fish or more.

Some Victorian pundits- including writers and other influential commentators- claim the Gippsland bream stock is under no threat. They may be right and we sincerely hope so. However it seems that their opinion is based solely on their ability to continue to catch fish. It does seem alarming that some experienced anglers note a distinct decline in the size of individual fish.

Victorian Fisheries and Wildlife has a relatively good record in the area of conservation of the resource and we know that they keep a watchful eye on such important stocks as Gippsland bream. However watching the number of fish being taken one wonders if a generous daily bag limit of some sort might not be of some benefit, even if only from the point of view of reducing the scope for criticism by uninformed or radical conservationists. Surely a bag limit of 30 bream per angler per day wouldn't offend too many anglers, nor overly restrict anyone's sport or their efforts to stock the freezer.

Editor

This interesting piece was part of a larger article written by a young Steve Starling 22 years ago, and it paints a very different picture of bream fishing on the Tambo in 1987 to what it is today. Add the problems of increased salinity, decline of seagrass, regular algae blooms, influx of European crabs, decline of river inflows and continuation of commercial netting, and one can readily understand why bream fishing is today in a parlous state and may be at risk in the Gippsland Lakes. It is worth remembering that one measure of the health of the fishery, namely the commercial catch has dropped from 277 tonnes in1987 to just 49 tonnes in 2006/7. In 1987 a bag limit of 30 fish per angler was suggested by Starling, whilst today many Gippsland anglers watching the decline in the black bream fishery would support a bag limit of 5 fish and a closure of the upper river spawning areas during spawning.

The real question is, what will the black bream fishery be like in twenty years time, given our experience of the last twenty years and this is largely in the hands of today's recreational anglers.

General Note

The next issue in November will be the last for the year. Thanks to those readers who contacted me following my recent open heart surgery. Another four weeks and I will be able to again drive my car and boat again all being well

We can provide a large print version of "Around the Jetties" to any reader having problems with the size of the print.

Remember your contributions to this newsletter are welcomed.

Good health and good fishing

Lynton Barr