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Around the Jetties

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An Anglers Newsletter

All good fishermen stay young until they die, for fishing is the only dream of youth that doth not grow stale with age.

J.W.

Muller

Editorial

The following letter on the new dusky flathead regulations from the Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria Anthony Hurst provides great news for East Gippsland recreational anglers and is an excellent example of anglers and Fisheries Victoria working together. Despite this good news when looking back over the year there have been a number of disappointments for anglers. The commitment of the Government to protect spawning fish at the mouth of rivers has not been met or even discussed, and the result of this lack of action was the massive kill of spawning black bream in commercial nets in the 2011/12-flood event. This may have been avoided had Government met its commitment.

Another disappointment has been the lack of action in the provision of artificial reefs to rural estuaries such as the Gippsland Lakes. In March, the Minister said that over the next four years artificial reefs would be assessed in "locations such as Gippsland Lakes, Western Port and Port Phillip Bay." Nothing further has been heard of this assessment despite reefs already in place in Port Phillip Bay and the construction of "a huge \$1m oceanic reef structure off the coast of Anglesea and Torquay."

It was disappointing that a request from some commercial fishermen "to have a voluntary buyback of commercial licences put back on the table for consideration" was not acted upon. Local member Tim Bull stated, "I have advised the Minister of this and asked that it be considered." (Issue 55 March 2012) Again, nothing has been heard of this request that could have reduced commercial netting pressure on Gippsland Lakes species.

Finally, there was an announcement by the local member (May 23rd 2012) that there was to be a \$100,000 project to stock the Nicholson River with Australian bass over 3 years. This was to be funded from the Recreational licence fees of anglers. What was not understood, by those responsible for the announcement, was that whilst the Nicholson River Dam was being decommissioned it would take three years to remove. Therefore, it would seem unlikely that any release would take place until the weir was physically removed. Nothing further has been heard of this proposal. In Issue 58 June

2012, we raised the question “Will the stocking of the Nicholson River with bass proceed, or will it be held over for three years?” Again no response!

New Dusky Flathead Regulations Introduced



On the 1/11/2012 new dusky flathead regulations were introduced by Fisheries Notice effective immediately. Readers of this newsletter would be aware of anglers input into this decision working with Fisheries Victoria to achieve an outcome that may protect this iconic species into the future, and remembering that the species extends from the Gippsland Lakes. The following is a letter to anglers from the Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria.

Dear Recreational Angler'

Thank you for your submissions about the proposed changes to recreational size limits for dusky flathead.

I have decided to proceed to implement a 30cm minimum size limit, and a 55cm maximum size limit for dusky flathead, after carefully considering all of written submissions.

Fifty-three submissions were received during the public consultation period. I am pleased to advise that the vast majority of submissions expressed support for the new size limits.

The new slot size will not apply to commercial fishing activity because it could cause wasteful discard of large dusky flathead. The current regulations for commercial fishing will remain in place.

The maximum size limit will provide protection for large breeding dusky flathead, particularly females. The maximum size limit is based on research that shows a decline in the abundance of dusky flathead above 55cms.

The increase of the minimum size limit from 27 to 30cms is based on feedback from recreational fishers.

I am taking a number of actions to educate recreational fishers about the new size limits including placing signage at popular fishing locations and distributing posters to fish and tackle shops, fishing clubs and Recreational Fishing Licence Agents in East Gippsland. We will follow up this action with an appropriate enforcement program once we have got the message out about the new rules.

*Yours Sincerely Anthony Hurst
Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria*

Editor

This is great news, and is a regulation change that has been sought by East Gippsland dusky flathead recreational fishermen over recent years. For a number of years it has been evident that there has been a marked decline in the number of large dusky flathead in East Gippsland estuaries, and with the NSW research (Gray and Barnes 2008) showing that almost all dusky flathead over 55cms in length are breeding females it seemed obvious that to maintain the stock of dusky flathead these breeding fish must be protected. This regulation will hopefully achieve this result.

The Gippsland Lakes

It is unfortunate that this regulation will not apply to commercial fishermen in the Gippsland Lakes, and somewhat surprising that the minimum size limit of 30cms will also not apply. This will again mean that recreational anglers will release breeding dusky flathead that then may be caught in commercial nets and sold. It is to be hoped that the dusky flathead of the Gippsland Lakes will be carefully monitored to assess whether this fishery is being placed under long-term threat by the commercial fishery operating outside the current regulations for recreational anglers.

In 2011/12 the commercial catch of dusky flathead was 22 tonnes and this tonnage has been relatively stable over the past four years with the average for this period being 20.27 tonnes per financial year over the period, however in the period 2005/6 the catch was 48.4 tonnes which then declined to the current level. Any further decline from the current level might lead to reconsidering whether a decline in the stock is associated with the removal of breeding fish in commercial nets.

Thanks to Fisheries Research for the current interim 2011/12 figures of the commercial catch of dusky flathead.



Stocking of Prawns in Lake Tyers Now Close



The following report is from Chris Setio from the University of NSW who has been working on the prawn project for Lake Tyers over the last eighteen months.

“A stocking of Eastern King Prawns will soon occur in Lake Tyers to enhance the lake’s recreational prawn fishery. When Lake Tyers is closed to the ocean (particularly in spring and summer) wild prawn larvae are unable to access the lake, and this project is aimed at supplying the prawns for that season. Stocking in Lake Tyers is planned for January or February 2012 where around 1 million prawns will be released. Researchers from the University of NSW will be sampling Lake Tyers in mid November to assess the conditions in preparation for this release. Sampling of Lake Tyers has been happening every four months to collect baseline data on the lakes condition and its biology. A key aspect was identifying the most common predators of prawns and how many they eat.

This baseline data is also used to calculate the appropriate stocking numbers for lake Tyers, using three different approaches. The first approach matches release numbers to the amount of habitat in the lake (such as seagrass), which acts as a refuge for juvenile prawns from predators. The second approach attempts to recreate a natural population, by stocking the same number to that observed when the lake is open to wild prawns. The third approach calculates how much food there is in the lake, and ensures that all stocked prawns get enough to eat. This third approach also requires knowledge of how fast prawns can grow, and experiments are ongoing at the University of NSW to calculate this.

These three approaches will be combined to estimate the best stocking numbers for Lake Tyers (probably around 1 million), and a hatchery in Queensland will start the prawn production around Xmas. In late January the prawns will be shipped to lake Tyers for stocking, and prawns will be released in specific areas of Lake Tyers, which maximize prawn survival and angler access. Intensive sampling of Lake Tyers will occur for a year after the release to monitor prawn health and survival, and to assess the success of the project. It is estimated that the stocked prawns will become table “prawns” 3-6 months after release.

This research is being funded from Victorian recreational fishing licence funds, and represents the latest step in a wider process being driven by the Victorian Government aimed at enhancing recreational fishing opportunities in Victoria. This research project will also gather important information for future marine stocking in the state. Chris Setio”

Editor

I thank Chris, and Dr Matt Taylor for being so helpful in providing this material when I was unable to meet with them due to the recent NZ trip. It’s going to be a quite exciting time to see the results of this stocking in the next twelve months. I still have a couple of concerns, one being that I understand two commercial bait licences apply to Lake Tyers. Are commercial bait fishermen going to net Lake Tyers for prawns, given the funding for the stocking has come from recreational licence fees? Secondly, if this stocking is a success will funding from licence be used to maintain stocking of Lake Tyers or is this a one stocking with no follow up.

I have received from Fisheries Victoria a fascinating report that fishing licence fees in Western Australia are being used to renew prawn stocks in the Swan and Canning Rivers as part of a three-year project. In this case they are using Western School prawns. The WA Minister for Fisheries has said, “collection of prawn broodstock from the Swan River will occur this month, and restocking of juvenile prawns will be undertaken during the summer.” The number of prawns to be released will depend on spawning success, but one river prawn can have more than half a million eggs. This release follows the release of juvenile black bream in both rivers over the last decade. Perhaps we should now also consider restocking the Gippsland Lakes with black bream?

A Suggestion Fisheries Research Faces Severe Cutbacks

The following article is provided by research scientist Joel Williams and reflects the concern of Fisheries researchers raised at a Queenscliff rally of sixty people.



“Minister Peter Walsh, Director of Fisheries Anthony Hurst and Travis Dowling had not been telling the whole story and have been putting a twist on what is actually occurring. Yes there will not be a change in net staff **BUT** there will be a reduction in the number of researchers from an already too low number of 30 to just

14. Managers from Melbourne are moving to Queenscliff to ‘centralize’ fisheries, the truth is they are moving to fill up the numerous empty desks within the MAFRI building. True no staff will be sacked, but, if enough staff don’t take the redundancy package the remaining staff will be moved to other jobs and other centres so that the number of researchers will be 14. Fourteen researchers cannot monitor and collect data on all marine and freshwater fisheries, it is logistically impossible. The reason why this hasn’t made the news earlier is because staff at the centre are being threatened if they contact the media directly or indirectly they will be instantly dismissed. That includes any social media interaction. This is pure Government bullying. Furthermore they are planning on removing all the labs, ecology, mapping, seagrass, ecotoxicology programs, after they have already removed the aquaculture program. In this day in an age when fish is in such high demand and recreational fishing is at its highest we need the researchers to monitor and collect data so that the necessary management decisions can be made to keep each fishery sustainable. So our kids and grandchildren

can enjoy fishing as we do. This is not to mention the lack of research on climate change and fisheries, which is set to have a huge impact across the state.



Yes, black bream stocks are at an all time low. My research started explaining some of the environmental reasons behind the reduction in stock, but it also indicated significant gaps in our knowledge. With these cuts going ahead I can be fairly confident that there will be no black bream research in Eastern Victoria coming out of Fisheries Victoria.

I am seriously concerned about what will be a significant loss of research. The same is occurring in NSW and Queensland. The FRDC have predicted that Australia will lose over 100 research positions.”

I asked Travis Dowling, Director of Fisheries Management and Research to comment on the issues raised at the Queenscliff rally and the following is his response.

“As discussed previously Fisheries Victoria is proceeding with the re-structure of the science area at Queenscliff. This will see a greater focus on fish stock assessments and harvest strategies. Fisheries will retain a strong science capacity that will increase in key areas relating specifically to better managing key recreational and commercial fishing.

There will be changes in the staff make up at Queenscliff, with fisheries management staff moving from Melbourne to Queenscliff.”

Editor

I had previously spoken to the Director of Fisheries Management and Research on this issue following the Black Bream Stock Assessment reported in the last issue of Around the Jetties. The Director indicated that over the years, research undertaken by Fisheries Victoria had been applied to many issues not directly related to fishing in this state. This was set to change, and part of this change was a consolidation of research at Queenscliff and a concentration of that research on the key recreational and commercial species in this state. This could result in more direct research on issues facing our major species, as well as a continuing assessment of fish stocks in this state. In other words fisheries would return to dealing with fisheries issues.

I would believe that recreational anglers would hope the level of research is at least maintained if not increased given the pressures on the major recreational species, and no better example exists than that of black bream.

East Gippsland Fishery Management Plan

The following is a brief summary of the 32-page document.

This Management Plan released in July 2012 specifies objectives and strategies for managing recreational fishing activities within the Mitchell, Tambo, Snowy and Far East river basins. The plan lists some basic objectives of a very general nature such as the protection and improvement of fish habitat, maintaining recreational fishing opportunities and ensuring sustainable recreational use of fisheries resources. This plan does not include the Gippsland Lakes or Lake Tyers. (Separate Management plans had been undertaken.) The plan will last for a period of at least 5 years.

Now what is of particular interest is that the plan objectives, strategies, actions, and performance will be reviewed by the East Gippsland Fishery Reference Group established by the Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria, that will meet at least once per year and advise the Executive Director on activities and projects that support management plans and monitor their implementation. Fisheries will provide the Reference Group chair and administrative support.

Now I am a little cynical of the commitment of Fisheries Victoria to the concept of a reference group given my experience with the Lake Tyers Reference Group which has met only once since the inception of the plan in 2007, nor has there been any report documenting performance prepared annually for Lake Tyers by Fisheries and the Reference Group. If the same lack of action by a reference group occurs in this Management Plan as has occurred in the Lake Tyers Management Plan then the actions proposed will be somewhat ad hoc to say the least.

The 32 page glossy document lists the areas to be covered and the rivers that flow into the basins including key rivers such as the Tambo, Mitchell, Nicholson and Snowy rivers,

as well as the Far East rivers such as the Bemm, Thurra, Betka, Genoa and Wallagaraugh. The document also provides a general outline on the key recreational species black bream, dusky flathead, estuary perch, Australian bass and trout.

The actions listed include

- Seeking funding from RFL Trust account to establish access point surveys of anglers at Bemm River.
- To review black bream fishery management and stock status. Discussion on a closed season as suggested by some stakeholders was rejected as being too difficult to implement.
- Fisheries Victoria will aspire to establish meaningful relationships with traditional owner groups.
- Fisheries Victoria and VRFish to support applications to improve fishing access.
- Within 3 years funding from RFL Trust Account to be sought to monitor East Gippsland black bream populations using the angler diary program with priority given to the Bemm, Tamboon Inlet and the Snowy River estuary.
- Within 3 years funding to be sought from the RFL trust Account to monitor the status of dusky flathead populations using the Angler Diary program.
- Within 2 years Fisheries Victoria to undertake a review of current management arrangements for estuary perch with a view to stocking estuary perch in the Bemm.
- Within 3 years funding to be sought from the RFL Trust Account to monitor bass populations using the Angler Diary program.
- The other items of action included VRFish promoting its Fishing Code of Conduct, Fisheries to promote community reporting of illegal fishing, and finally the DPI to work with other agencies such as the Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy where they may affect recreational fishing

Editor

I would have thought most of the actions listed in the East Gippsland Fishery Management Plan were little more than was already expected of Fisheries Victoria, and the monitoring of species was a basic role of Fisheries Managers. I was surprised that the rivers of the basins including key black bream rivers such as the Mitchell, Tambo, and Nicholson did not rate a greater examination given the movement of black bream to spawn in these rivers in recent years, due to the increased salinity of the lakes. Some suggested actions of the Management Plan have already been overtaken by recent actions of Fisheries Victoria such as the draft plan for dusky flathead, and announcements of bass stocking in the Nicholson river. We have Management Plans for most of the Gippsland Fisheries, and in most publications material is repeated. I wonder whether a better and more economic method of developing management plans for recreational fisheries might be explored. In the glossy publication of management plans for Mallacoota and Lake Tyers I would suggest 80% of the material in these publications was word for word identical.

Is this the End for VicTag

I asked Bruce Robinson a former coordinator of VicTag for a report on this organisation as I had heard it was facing difficulties. This is his report.

The Australian National Sportsfish Association (ANSA) ran the VicTag program until recently and I was the program coordinator. Please note all information contained within this response is my opinion and not that of ANSA.

The executive committee of ANSA Victoria are a fantastic group of dedicated people who were unfortunately left with no option but to shut the program down due to the lack of Government funding/ support. The program had always relied heavily on this funding to support the purchase of tags and administrative costs. The coordinator role was voluntary and took a significant amount of time and this program was without a

doubt one of the most successful tagging programs in Australia. This is something ANSA can be very proud of.

When the program was shut down in excess of 78,000 fish had been tagged with a recapture rate of approx 3.5%. These recaptures revealed some amazing information about species growth rates and movements. Over 300 people had been involved in tagging fish. In the early years of the program it was strongly supported by fisheries researchers and taggers, funding was relatively easy to gain. However in the last 10 years while the Recreational Fishing Grants Program advertised funds as being available the strict parameters the grants program place on funding grants strained our program to breaking point. As an example of how strict recreational fishing grants have become is we could not place a submission for tagging fish across the state, it had to be specific with key milestones that had to meet by certain timelines. VicTags last successful funding grant was for 1000 King George Whiting and 2500 Gippsland Lakes Black Bream to be tagged within a set period. Tee bar tags do not come cheap with a slide of 50 tags costing approximately \$30. With many of the active Taggers not targeting the species that the funding had been granted for, I had no choice but to restrict issuing tags to Taggers who could help us meet the fund grants objective, this effectively ostracized 2/3 rds of our Taggers.

I do not think the decision makers understand the benefit that is provided by a conventional tagging program with the history of VicTag, the species data that can be provided to researchers, sustainable fishing ethics it promotes, the interest it generates when a tagged fish is caught and the educational value it provides to the general public when anglers learn about growth rates and species travel distance cannot be under estimated. The last submission by ANSA on behalf of VicTag was a last attempt to gain funding to keep the program ticking over. A proposal was submitted to tag Port Phillip Bay Snapper, unfortunately we were unsuccessful in this round of grants, however one of the programs we competed against for funds, was a program to tag 70 snapper with surgical implanted sonic tags managed by Fisheries this proposal was successful in gaining \$200,000 worth of funding and does not engage anyone in the general community or promote any type of ethics as VicTag did. \$200,000 would have supported the volunteer run VicTag program with tags, tagging equipment and sustainable fishing practices promotional material for the next 10 years! The data from the VicTag program has now been handed over to Fisheries researchers for their use and the program has been shut down.

Editor

It would be my hope that VicTag could receive the minimal funding required to continue its statewide program. I can understand Fisheries Victoria requiring specific information on a species that the statewide program cannot meet; however the information from VicTag in the past has been little short of amazing. I have mentioned previously the work of the late Peter Spehrs who tagged over 5,000 fish mostly dusky flathead and black bream. The work he did on dusky flathead provided tangible information on the size decline of this species with the introduction of soft plastic lures at Tyers and Mallacoota. He also tagged a bream that moved from Lake Tyers to Mallacoota, one of the only confirmed reports of movements between estuaries. This is only in this local area, however across the state with the movement of sharks and snapper as gauged by over 300 voluntary taggers an enormous pool of information is collated. I simply wonder how Fisheries Victoria, and the Working Group that allocates funds from anglers licence fees can ignore this great volunteer effort. I would have thought Fisheries Victoria would be seeking the small amount of funding required to keep this group of volunteers working, after all considerable funding in the past has gone to Fishcare, a volunteer organisation that in 2008/9 received \$340,000 from the Recreational Licence Trust account over three years. As Bruce Robinson said a figure like that would fund VicTag for 10-12 years and develop an enormous pool of information on our recreational species.

Change and the Gippsland Lakes

This is an article from Henri Ellis that provides some challenging issues for recreational anglers and others to consider

There are so many groups and organisations which have a vested interest in the future of the Gippsland Lakes and the pluralism of views confounds and sometimes contradicts what many experience with their own eyes and what scientific studies are telling them.

When some of you read the words “vested interest”, you immediately think of those groups that might be oppose your point of view regarding the appropriate strategies needed to stop the degradation of the Lakes or rehabilitate areas or species already at tipping point.

When we talk of vested interest we tend to ignore our own “vested interest” and denigrate that of our adversaries.

One of the first things we need to do is take the emotion out of the argument and talk of all the stakeholders who have a pecuniary interest in activities broadly associated with the Gippsland Lakes or are affected by, or have a concern with an issue/s related to the Lakes system e.g. environmentalists and anglers.

Some of the groups are easily identifiable and are indeed vocal in voicing concerns: recreational and professional fishers, the boating enthusiasts, the boating industry, hospitality and tourism operators, farmers, developers, the retail industry, boat tour and charter operators etc.

However, we tend to overlook the symbiotic impact the degradation or inappropriate development has on the communities living on or near the Gippsland Lakes and their well-being.

Recently, I was rather intrigued and somewhat perplexed by the increasing tendency to rationalise away undesirable phenomena associated with the Lakes, namely salinity and algae blooms.

At one gathering I attended a speaker referred to the undeniable fact that the lakes have always had algal blooms, that fish eat algae (also true for some species) and that we will have to learn to live with blooms.

It wasn't intentional on the speaker's part to infer that we had nothing to worry about, but that wasn't the impact the words had on some in the audience.

Many left with the impression alarmists were making a mountain out of a molehill and we should not be too upset about it all. It's like telling a patient with a terminal illness to live with it and do nothing about it.

Many believe that recent dredging has had a deleterious effect by increasing salinity levels thereby affecting the fish species population, causing seagrass depletion and disrupting the food chain of black bream and other species.

Increased salinity levels in the major rivers means bream are travelling further upstream to spawn in low salinity water, and fishing pressure from recreational anglers and professional fishers means fewer bream spawn and recruitment (or renew ability) of the existing population is more difficult, and any increase in numbers is problematical or well nigh impossible.

But some are saying? Bow to inevitability, and make the Lakes a high salinity (saltwater) environment by dredging multiple entrances. Sure it will change the flora and fauna of the Lakes and land usage but it will have beneficial effects for the off shore fishing industry, and tourism.

Others take a head in the sand attitude – we need to live with variability, because our climate is notoriously fickle, Fish recruitment is more affected by climate variability than anything else they say, so live with it.

These issues pose important questions for the Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Committee to address.

Some have criticised the composition of the committee, but it is early days and the proof of the pudding will be in the eating.

It has been praised for being representative of local interests rather than being dominated by scientific boffins or alternatively damned because scientific representation and expertise is thin on the ground.

When you look at the skills areas of the committee members cited in the joint Ministerial Media Release of 28th March 2012, from one to four skills areas were cited for each member. Accordingly, six members have skills in the Environment area, six cited Business skills, five Tourism skills, two Planning skills, and in the skills areas of Catchment Management, Management, Education, Water Quality and Science one member is cited in each category.

There is no doubting the very real concern our local members of parliament have in the well being of the Gippsland Lakes with Tim Bull the state MLA and Darren Chester, the Federal MHR speaking with one voice about the need to improve the environmental health of the Lakes.

Trenchant critics, however remain cynical that little of any substance or significance happens on the ground.

Recently in discussions with some anglers I mentioned the need to discuss strategies such as no take zones and closed season for black bream in the Lakes

Expecting to be howled down others didn't react with disdain but wanted to say why I thought so, and before long despite vigorous disagreement we at least did agree on three things:

1. Over the long term bream numbers have dwindled for a variety of reasons primarily environmental
2. Bag and size limits have had little effect on recruitment and if anything size limits should be increased
3. If all else fails closed season during spawning should be considered.

Let us all hope on this issue and others the members of the Gippsland lakes Ministerial Advisory Committee have the courage to address the serious issues, and not pander to "vested interests".

The Contributor

Henrie Ellis lives at Wy Yung and has been a keen saltwater and freshwater angler for over 55 years. After retiring as a principal ten years ago, he runs a consulting business in partnership with his wife, a journalist and has contributed to fishing magazines and edited South East Fishing and North East Angling magazines for two years. He was awarded the Centenary Medal by the Commonwealth for services to sport, education and the community.

Odd Bits and More

A Mornings Fishing on Lake Eildon

Perhaps readers might now consider the possibility of a trip to Lake Eildon for a couple of days fishing. A couple of weeks ago I had to attend an event in Mansfield and managed to get in a mornings fishing on Lake Eildon which is now 100% full. The green countryside and the timber in the lake made a beautiful picture. My friends launched their boat in the Campagnola's Arm and we spent the morning trawling this water and then the Fords Creek Arm.



I had not seriously fished this water for probably forty years and the luxury homes around the lake had certainly changed the outlook from those years. Rowan and I each caught a brown trout around about the 2lb mark on Rapalla lures.█

But that's not the real story. Rowan had a mate John fishing with a friend over near the Bonnie Doon Arm, and we had 4 or 5 telephone calls from the Bonnie Doon Arm reporting on the mornings fishing. The first call indicated they had caught six trout the best 6lb. All of which were released. A little later a call from John stated they had just

boated and released 12.1lb yellowbelly and this was followed by a later call to state they had hooked, boated, and released 65cm Murray Cod that went 12.5lb. As our morning finished John reported that the total of trout boated for the mornings fishing was 11 of which most were released. The trout were all caught on soft plastic lures being trawled whilst the large natives were caught on hard-bodied lures. An interesting aspect of the morning was that both of our trout were caught within 50 metres of each other, and John reported that all of the fish boated were caught within a 100 metre stretch of the lake close to trees in the water.

I suppose the real fact that was brought home to me was that this lake is now a fishery, which provides excellent trout fishing as well as a great native species fishery. This publication has reported on the aim of Fisheries Victoria to stock a million cod in Lake Eildon in three years, however cod have been stocked over many years and the benefits of those earlier releases can be seen in the fishery right now. This is on top of a small self-sustaining cod fishery of forty years ago. The future recreational fishing in Lake Eildon given adequate water will be magnificent, and perhaps more anglers will travel to experience this very special fishery, given the declining recreational fishery of the Gippsland Lakes.

Two Million Native Fish Stocked

A Fish Fax of 8th October announced that the Victorian Government had stocked two million native fish into lakes and rivers to improve recreational fishing opportunities across the state. More than one million of the fish were golden perch and 885,000 Murray cod as well as Australian bass, silver perch, estuary perch, and Macquarie perch. It was stated in this release that most of the fish were released as fingerlings and would take 3-5 years to reach minimum legal size.

While the Government claims responsibility for this excellent stocking result it should be acknowledged that the funding for most of the restocking is derived from anglers licence fees.



Burrunan Dolphin Proposed for Listing as a Threatened Species

The same Fish Fax above that provided information on the fish stocked in state waters in the past year, suggested anglers should have their say on the proposed listing of this species of dolphin as a threatened species. This is the dolphin that inhabits the Gippsland Lakes and number about 50, whilst the Scientific Advisory Committee assessing the status of this dolphin suggests this number could reach 150 in winter. It is also thought that 80-100 of this species can be found in Port Phillip Bay. The Scientific Advisory Committee has recommended the dolphin for listing as a threatened species. Readers will recall in an article by Ross Scott that it is thought 15 dolphins died in the Gippsland Lakes in recent years as a result of mercury poisoning.

I doubt that any anglers would have any objection to this dolphin being declared a protected species, however to comment is rather difficult when the Fish Fax is dated the 8th October and the date for closure of comments is Monday 15th October.

Growth Of Fish Farms Approved

The Federal Government has given the go ahead for the nations largest fish farm in Tasmania's Macquarie Harbour. The increased fish farming would provide extra jobs as the area under fish pens increases from 564ha to 926ha and would see the tripling of production from 8,000 tons to 24,000 tonnes of salmon.

It is difficult given the massive tonnage of fish raised in such a project, how any argument can be advanced for the retention of the netting of dusky flathead and black bream in the Gippsland Lakes, when the normal catch of black bream is under 50 tonnes and the catch of dusky flathead is under 20 tonnes. These species if

protected and managed could provide the basis for the biggest estuary fishery in this state with all the benefits that would provide to tourism and local business. This will not occur when 144 tonnes and 96 tonnes of spawning black bream are removed at the mouth of our rivers in commercial nets during flood events such as occurred in 2007/8 and 2011/12.

Seagrass in The Gippsland Lakes

Readers would be aware of a recent report in this publication on a snapshot study “Fish Assemblages and Seagrass Condition in the Gippsland Lakes 2012” by Warry and Hindell. In this study 30 sites were studied for seagrass in the lakes, and the report stated “In April 2012, seagrass condition had declined at 42.7of transects (sites) compared with April 2011.” This study also suggests a decline in seagrass since the last major study 1997.

Now whilst this is a scientific snapshot of seagrass conditions anglers have commented to me at the lack of any seagrass being washed onto the shore of Lake King and other areas after a strong southwesterly wind. This year no seagrass at all has been evident on the shore yet some 4-5 years ago truckloads of seagrass were washed onto the beach of Lake King. It has been reported that bait fishermen are finding it difficult to find seagrass meadows of sufficient density to catch shrimp for bait. Perhaps it is time for another major study to provide a comparison of seagrass today as compared with the last study in 1997, given the importance of seagrass to the health of the lakes and fish stocks within the lakes.

Restocking Winton Wetlands

I recently noted in the Executive Officers report to the VRFish State Council the following-

“Recently VRFish has been approached by the Winton Wetlands Trust (part of DSE) to look at restocking the Winton Wetlands (formerly Lake Mokoan). To date we have had only one meeting but the signs are very positive. This is supported by the DPI Fisheries Victoria, and it would be a fantastic outcome to get a quality native fishery like this back in operation in the North East.”



(Around the Jetties Issue 26 June 2009.)

Undoubtedly this would be a great outcome if long-term water could be guaranteed, with a reasonable depth and access for anglers. Readers of this publication will recall the harrowing tale of dead Golden perch and cod and the efforts of local anglers to save hundreds of these dying fish when Lake Mokoan was decommissioned in 2009. The Tatong Angling Club at that time in a letter to the Minister stated “The effort to relocate the fish at the time, while commendable, need to be put in perspective as only 107 cod were relocated yet hundreds if not thousands perished in the receding waters.”

Perhaps we should recall the words of an angler who wrote a detailed report on this disaster-

“At this time the lake was down to 200mm and fish were flopping around. The angler who provided this report translocated 22 cod between 700-800mm to Casey’s Weir, which was against the law but in his words “morally right.” The Tatong Angling Club came into action, again without authority, and they caught and relocated 19 large cod to the Broken River.”

Now what is cause for concern is that the Winton Wetlands News has specifically stated “The Winton Wetlands are not expected to hold water all the time. These wetlands will experience natural wet and dry cycles which is important to their ecological health.” This would seem to suggest stocking with native fish might again be a disaster similar to the 2009 event.

Julia Menzies Fisheries Manager, Fisheries Victoria has stated in a letter on this issue “I understand, the Committee of Management are working on a proposal to stock and undertake relevant research at the Winton

Wetlands. Please note any proposal would need to carefully consider issues of water security and angler access when developing stocking proposals for Vic Fish Stocking meetings.

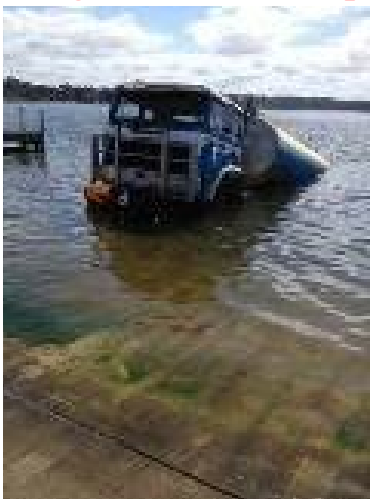
I have received from Dr Bill Sykes, State Member for Benalla and Parliamentary Secretary for Primary Industries, a most detailed explanation of the case being put for restocking prepared by Yvette Campbell of the Wetlands Committee of Management. Whilst unable to reprint this excellent paper, it does indicate that a specialist water ecologist has been engaged to assess former fish stocking of Lake Mokoan 1982-2002. An assessment of water security will be made and presented to Fisheries Victoria. Regarding drying out this has occurred previously, first recorded in 1896 when a report stated “thousands of fish from 10 to 50 pounds are dying.”

Yvette Campbell suggests if the water security issue is deemed to bigger risk the proposal will be withdrawn. It is also stated that only non powered boats such as sail boats, canoes and kayaks will be permitted on the Winton wetlands.

The issue has been raised following our grave concern at the fish kill during the decommissioning of Lake Mokoan and the lack of a structure to save this fish stock. It is now up to others to make decisions on the wetlands remembering the pictures of the fish kill this newsletter brought to anglers in issue 26 June 2009.

My Thanks to Dr Bill Sykes, MP, and Yvette Campbell for their contribution to this discussion.

Dangerous Boat Ramps



Readers will recall that in February we brought to the attention of readers the dangerous state of some boat launching ramps and many will recall the photo of the truck that had slipped off the Metung ramp when it could not get traction and ended of the ramp. Readers will also recall the petition was supported by this publication seeking safe launching sites at North Arm ramp and Metung ramp. I have been in touch with the East Gippsland Shire and was informed that the mentioned ramps are being cleaned of slime weekly as an interim safety measure. However, long term a fibre glass grating will be attached to these ramps to provide traction. I was informed that this had been trialled by WA Council that had a similar problem to that being experienced by these boat ramps in the Gippsland Lakes. Graeme Reeve of the East Gippsland Shire informed me that the gratings had been ordered and he hoped they would be installed by the end of November. In talking to several boat users some doubts were expressed as to whether the fibreglass grating could withstand a boat coming off a trailer and whether

they could be securely attached to the present ramps. Only time will tell, but at least it is an attempt to make these ramps safe, and if this fails it would seem the ramps might need to be replaced.

Water Birds and the Gippsland Lakes

Recently I together with a number of Metung readers have been amazed at several large rafts of birds in the Lake King Area. I asked Ken Sherring, of Birdlife East Gippsland for some information on this occurrence.

Ken supplied the following observation.



“With the unusually high rainfall in the last couple of years there has been a breeding of waterbirds throughout the inland of Australia. This year has seen an increase in the number of waterbirds across the Gippsland lakes. For sometime now there has been a large raft of Eurasian Coot estimated to be 2500 in number often seen floating off Metung. These birds have a vegetarian diet and dive for food.

Birdlife East Gippsland recently saw large numbers of Australian Pelicans and Black Swans on nests on islands close to the Grange on a recent boating trip. On the clubs same boating trip massive flocks of ducks were seen. These were mostly Chestnut Teal but also included Grey Teal and a surprisingly large number of

the diving Hardhead. Another of the diving variety seen was the Grebe that seemed to be floating and diving wherever you looked. Very large flocks of the fish eating Little Cormorants were seen and large flocks of Great Cormorants were also seen. These birds have been team fishing, helped by Pelicans on the Mitchell, Nicholson and Tambo Rivers recently. More than 500 Little Cormorants were seen perched and team fishing in a cove on the black fellow Arm of Lake Tyers in July.”

Editor

Thanks to Ken for this report. I followed this up by examining a couple of bird books on the Eurasian Coot only to find they were regarded as somewhat nomadic, and large numbers suddenly appear where in the past they have been seen only sporadically. They are capable of long sustained flight and generally travel at night presumably to avoid predators. They are generally recognised by the white flash on the forehead. They are found throughout Australia on fresh or brackish lakes and swamps.



Access and Facilities at Lake Tyers

During this year several full day excursions took place involving Parks Victoria, Fisheries Victoria, several local anglers, and on one occasion the local member Tim Bull and Christopher Collins from VRFish. The intent was to examine options for improving access on the Eastern tracks to Lake Tyers, with some emphasis on access for the elderly and handicapped. It was also intended that current camping and small boat launching conditions would be examined with a view to improving these areas. These excursions were reported in issues of Around the Jetties. (See March Issue 55) It would appear at this stage that almost nothing has been accomplished from these

discussions, probably due to a lack of available funding. Of course approaches to improve facilities were not helped with the damage done at Cherry Tree and the Burnt Bridge area by vandals destroying the excellent barbeque facilities. I do hope that the tracks and basic facilities for camping and access will continue to be an issue pursued by all the parties who spent the days last year discussing options for improvement.

Gippsland Boating Action Plan 2012

Readers will remember the furore created by Gippsland Lakes Coastal Board with the release of the Action Plan prepared by Ainley Projects in May of this year that saw changes at Bemm River that could have denied access to anglers



and locals. This report received numerous submissions from across the state. The Coastal Board indicated on the 7th July that the changes made to the original draft would be included on the Boards website and the document would then be sent to the Minister for Climate and the Environment Ryan Smith. Since that time the Board has been changed and nothing has been heard from the Minister on the Gippsland Boating Coastal Action Plan 2012. The many anglers, clubs and communities that provided submissions to this report are left to wonder. The Coastal Board in July said on its website “Watch this space for announcement.” Anglers are still watching and waiting.

This was reported on in detail in Issues of this publication.

To Contributors

Thank you for the valuable contributions to this final issue for 2013 and contributions during the year and of course special thanks to Fisheries Victoria for the many helpful contributions over the past year. It has been a big year that has seen the readership continually grow by word of mouth. This year we have produced ten issues 53-63 all averaging 8,000 words or 80,000 words in articles over the year.

Next Issue of Around the Jetties

The next issue of Around the Jetties will be the February issue. We aim at ten issues per year and with this issue we have already produced ten issues, and yes the Production Department did enjoy the Cruise to NZ.

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..

Thanks To those readers of hard copy who have forwarded stamps or donated funds for printing. Your thoughtful assistance is greatly appreciated, as with the success of the publication the costs of production have greatly increased

Good Health and Good fishing

Lynton Barr

Merry Xmas

On behalf of Dawn (The Production Department) and myself, we wish all readers a Very Merry Xmas and Happy and Healthy New Year





LG Barr original - Lake Buffalo Scene Painted Spring 2012