

# Around the Jetties

January 2015

Issue No 86

## An Anglers Newsletter

**“In November 1892 a report on the fishing industry made firm recommendations for closed areas in the lakes and restrictions on all lakes and river netting.”**

**Tambo Shire Centenary History by John D. Adams 1981**

## A New Year, a New Government, and New Policies

### Editorial



Welcome to 2015 and a complete new approach to recreational fishing in this State. I cannot help but feel whilst many great achievements of the previous Government occurred in the area of recreational fishing, it was a period of lost opportunities for recreational anglers.

Perhaps the greatest lost opportunity was the chance to protect spawning fish at the mouth of rivers. After four years and a firm Government commitment, nothing was brought forward until a couple of days prior to the election. No input from anglers was sought, despite a commitment that input would be sought from stakeholders and a questionable research paper was released on the subject just days prior to the election denying the need for spawning fish protection. No comment was forthcoming from the Minister or local member on this outcome despite the commitment to protect spawning fish at the mouth of rivers entering the Gippsland Lakes.

The issue of the Maasbanker and its disregard of recreational surf anglers could surely have been resolved with the introduction of a negotiated exclusion zone. Despite calls for action, Government representatives ignored this matter.

Another lost opportunity was to have the dam on the Nicholson River removed or a fish ladder installed to allow bass movement to the Gippsland Lakes for the annual spawning. East Gippsland water wanted the dam removed, and the State and Federal Government of the same political persuasion could surely have resolved this issue working together, but nothing was done. Another opportunity was lost. These were only relatively small issues but could have made a long-term difference to recreational fishing if they had been acted upon by the Government of the day.

### **Labours Recreational Fishing Policy**

I have attached the only policy on recreational fishing I have accessed, dated November 17<sup>th</sup> 2014. (*See later for a short analysis of this policy.*)



## **The Policy - LABOR ANGLING FOR ONE MILLION RECREATIONAL FISHERS**

**Daniel Andrew's Labor Government will invest \$35 million to phase out commercial netting, upgrade fishing clubs, and increase the number of recreational fishers to one million by the year 2020.**

Under Labour's plan, Target One Million will encourage more Victorians to take up a great pastime, which currently contributes \$2.3 billion to Victoria's social and economic wellbeing. Labour will

- Allocate \$20 million to halt commercial netting in Port Phillip and Corio Bays over eight years, increasing fish stocks for recreational anglers and offering a clear and fair exit strategy for licence holders. Labor will impose a sliding cap on the commercial catch based on the average catch over the previous three years. The cap will reduce each year to prevent licence holders from expanding their operations. Labor will also ban netting at the mouth of rivers in the Gippsland Lakes
- Establish a \$10 million Better Fishing Facilities Fund to develop new recreational fishing reefs, improved boat launching facilities and access to waterways, and install fish cleaning tables and fish aggregating devices.
- Invest \$5 million in Target One Million's stocking and education programs. Under this plan all fishing clubs will be eligible for 'Stronger Fishing Clubs' grants of up to \$2000 to promote membership and fishing in their community. Labour will also implement a marine species stocking program in Victoria's drought affected bays and inlets, and increase fish stocks from 3 million to 5 million a year. School education and children's fishing programs will also be established with Parks Victoria.

Labor will also take action to maintain Lake Toolondo as Victoria's best trout fishing location, open recreational cod fisheries in Beechworth and aim to stock 15,000 one year old barramundi into Hazelwood Pondage to create a new recreational fishery for the Latrobe Valley. In addition, no new marine parks will be established under Labor.

The Naphthine Coalition Government made life harder for fishers, cutting funds to Fisheries Victoria and sacking a record number of researchers. In Victoria, 750,000 people currently participate in recreational fishing.

### **An Angler Review of this Policy**

This policy is very thin and provides little of substance generally and very little for East Gippsland.

- It is a great aim to encourage the number of recreational anglers to reach one million by 2020, however facilities for this increasing number do not seem to match the additional 300,000 anglers. When one considers the launching ramps, parking, stocking, and vision for the future, this policy does not meet basic needs in its current form.
- The allocation of \$20 million to halt commercial netting in Port Phillip and Corio Bays over eight years means an allocation of only \$2.5 million per year. In addition, no reference is made to any buyback of commercial licences in the Gippsland Lakes. This is disappointing for recreational anglers across the state. It may mean the Labor Government has little understanding of the importance of the Gippsland Lakes as the largest estuary in this state.
- The sliding cap on the commercial catch if introduced would encourage commercial licence holders to take advantage of any buyback offer, as their catch would be reduced annually. This does seem to be a positive move.
- Labor will also ban netting at the mouth of rivers in the Gippsland Lakes, however no indication is given how this will be accomplished or the time line. I hope that it will not take four years and will take into account the views of the recreational fishing community.
- I would think the \$10 million Better Fishing Facilities Fund for reefs, boat launching facilities access to waterways etc would be a minimal figure that will achieve little. Perhaps \$50 million might be a more realistic figure. \$10 million over four years is only \$2.5 million per annum. Perhaps if funds from the Gippsland Lake Ministerial Advisory committee (\$13 million over 4 years) were directed to this fund a better outcome might be achieved.
- Increasing stocking from 3 million to 5 million and marine species stocking in drought affected bays and inlets provides no specific information on the bays and inlets and species to be stocked. This is a continuing problem with this policy, and it is very hard to analyse such projects or where they will take place.
- The development of Lake Toolondo in the Wimmera as one of the states leading trout waters will depend on the availability of water. If permanent water can be achieved it will be a significant development and provide a wonderful fishing venue for the west of the state. Currently Lake Toolondo is 17% full and many anglers fear the big trout in this lake might not survive low water levels and high temperatures. (Latest Information from the Weekly Times December 31<sup>st</sup>)
- The stocking of the Hazelwood Pondage with barramundi is an interesting concept, however it has been tried before. In Issue 31 (January 2010) of this publication the following item appeared under the heading of the Future Fish Foundation

“The other project creating considerable interest is the study being undertaken to examine the feasibility of establishing a barramundi fishery in the Hazelwood Pondage in Gippsland. Future Fish is investing \$50,000 in the “Barramundi in Hazelwood” project. Future Fish believed if this project is approved after a comprehensive scientific assessment, “Victorians could be enjoying a recreational barramundi fishery within two years.” (Future Fish Foundation News)

Following this report I had the following note from the Public Affair Officer for Hazelwood International, who indicated that “as owners of the facility that supplies cooling water to Hazelwood,” International Power Hazelwood would make the final decision, and not Fisheries Victoria on the stocking of the pondage.” Following this note, nothing further was heard of the Future Fish proposal or of the spending of \$50,000 to achieve this fishery. I wonder whether this proposal has been negotiated with Hazelwood International.

Finally, the Labor policy document acknowledges that a record number of researchers had been sacked by the cutting of funding to Fisheries Victoria., however unfortunately no commitment to restore this research area of Fisheries Victoria has been made in this policy.

I think most anglers would be hoping for considerably more detail in this policy. Perhaps more detail will be provided in the future but the policy as it stands provides little for anglers to be enthusiastic about apart from the buyback of commercial licences, and the policy would seem to be grossly under funded, given the economic importance of recreational angling to this State.

## **Quotes Attributed to the New Premier, Daniel Andrews**

“By supporting clubs and phasing out commercial netting, we can increase the number of recreational fishers to one million by the year 2020.”

and

“More people should get outdoors and enjoy this great pastime, which contributes so much to our economy and our way of life.”

**Taken from the Andrews Media Release of the 17<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

## **Meet the Minister**



**The Minister for Agriculture in the Labor Government is the Hon. Jaala Pulford, and included in her responsibilities are those of recreational fishing.**

The Hon Jaala Pulford is a member of the Legislative Council (Upper House) who was first elected MLC for Western Victoria in 2006 and she has been a member of the Victorian Parliament since that date.

**Prior to that she was an organiser for the National Union of Workers, Victorian Branch 1994-2006, and a Strategic Advisor, Shannon’s Way 2006**

**She has been Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Ministers for Regional and Rural development and Agriculture February.2012- December 2014.She has held numerous Parliamentary and Party positions.**

**The Minister who lives in Ballarat is a member of the Australian Labor Party, National Union of Workers, Labor Women’s Network, Emily’s List, and Ballarat Soccer and Sports Club.**

The Minister lists her interests as spending time with the family, travel, music and camping.

### **Editor**

Whilst anglers will welcome the new Minister to her role it would seem obvious that she will have a great deal to assimilate in assisting a sport that has over 750,000 participants and an estimated annual contribution to this states economy of \$825 million and over the next twenty years a contribution of \$10.6 billion. (2009 Economic study of Recreational fishing in Victoria Ernst and Young.)

Issues such as the protection of spawning fish at the mouth of rivers entering the Gippsland Lakes, and protection of fish stocks in this the largest estuary in the state will be immediate local issues to address.

**Recreational anglers will wish the Minister well in her challenging new role.**

## **Protection of Spawning Fish Becomes a Sad a Joke**

Readers of this angler newsletter would be well aware of the concern expressed over the last decade at the lack of **any protection for spawning fish at the mouth of rivers entering the Gippsland Lakes.** Recreational anglers were delighted when protection for these spawning fish was a firm commitment of the Coalition Government made in 2010.

After several years and no action on this commitment, the local member Tim Bull in answer to a question on the subject in 2013 stated, “Fisheries Victoria has recently commenced a review of netting around river mouths in the Gippsland Lakes and I am advised this will be looking at the relationship between floods and commercial catch rates and spawning periods. **I am also advised there will be an opportunity for stakeholders input once some basic data has been completed.**”

No further information was made available to recreational anglers. It was therefore somewhat surprising that nineteen days prior to the election Fisheries Victoria released a 24 page study entitled

**“Investigating the impacts of net fishing near river mouths during the spawning season”** with the surprising result of no change in river mouth regulations which meant, **“No additional controls on commercial netting in the Gippsland Lakes,”** and **“the 400 metre commercial exclusion zones will remain.”**

Accompanying this report was the notice of a meeting to be held in Lakes Entrance on December the 9th to **discuss** the research that had been undertaken. Despite both the Minister Peter Walsh and the local member Tim Bull, indicating both recreational anglers and commercial fishers would have input into any discussion on this subject, no stakeholder input was sought from recreational anglers.

Apart from the statement of Tim Bull in 2013, recreational anglers were totally unaware of this study or its ramifications. The release of the study so close to the election meant that stakeholders including recreational anglers would not have any significant input into this document. **It would seem this release was a political action with little concern for the views of the stakeholders who had sought action over a long period.**

Following the calling of the meeting to discuss this research, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December, I received a letter indicating the meeting had been cancelled. The reason was given that, **“it is unfortunately necessary to cancel this meeting until such time as the department has had the opportunity to meet with a new government administration with regard to ongoing fishery management in the Gippsland Lakes.”**

I understand that no notice of cancellation would appear in local papers as the meeting was not advertised in local papers but rather invitations were sent to selected anglers. I also believe a separate meeting for the ten commercial fishermen was to be held at the Fishermen’s Cooperative, continuing the commercial fishing ban on meeting with recreational anglers, which has been in place since the black bream stock assessment of 2005.

So ended for now a most unfortunate episode, and the recreational anglers of the Gippsland Lakes are again the losers. Spawning black bream stocks are open to continued netting pressure at the mouth of rivers. However, not all hope is lost as the incoming Labor Government has in its recreational fishing policy, the banning of netting at the mouth of rivers that enter the Gippsland Lakes. **Recreational anglers should let the new Minister know of their concerns, and hope another four years will not elapse before action to protect black bream stocks at the mouth of rivers is introduced.**

**(I have received these letters highly critical of the report received just days before the election.)**

Lynton and Dawn,

Thankyou for your earlier email directing me to the report.

This cancellation is very interesting, research findings in theory should be above politics!

I have downloaded the paper and have had a quick high level look at it.

It seems to be in response to a very narrow scope.

It is not surprising that spawning does not always coincide with high rainfall events that cause flooding!

The fact that Large and Very Large catches also deplete the system of large numbers of fish seems to have been lost!

I am far from an expert in these matters, however if common sense applies, I would expect fish to migrate out of the rivers in response to the declining salinity levels that occur during or soon after an upstream high rainfall event and the associated flooding.

I would expect the fish to have exited the rivers within hours of the river(s) rising and this is the only time when closures would need to apply. I expect this would have occurred by the time the rivers have peaked and fishing could then be re-opened. (I note that the number of unavailable fishing days seems to feature in the reasons why height based closures will impact on the economic performance of the fishery.) Surely, this would require no more than a 48hr (or maybe a 72hr closure at most) and if we conservatively assume one high rainfall event a year, we would only have a loss of 3 days in 365 available days a year or a less than 1% reduction in available fishing days.

Alternatively extend 400m to a larger distance for these short periods!

Little or no thought seems to have gone into finding a suitable outcome.

Regards

John R. Blain

Director, Ninox Solutions Pty Ltd.

Dear Linton

Thank you for bringing to our attention the captioned report. I wonder how long it would take for it

to be publicly announced. The cynic in me suggests it would be after the upcoming meeting!  
I have some serious issues with the statistical methods used to arrive at the report findings.

There are many contradictions and **IMPORTANT DATA HAS BEEN EXCLUDED.**

Table 2 acknowledges data from 2008-2012 was used to present "Average" data. That period only takes to account the time "Post 400m exclusion" All other data was from 2003 -2012.

What would the averages show if all of the data is included? ie. Did the catch rates drop post exclusion? The only reason I can see for excluding data or misusing data, is to arrive at a **preconceived position.**

I would expect that research, which is being paid for by the 700000+ anglers, would be less biased, more open and only after proper consultation with stake holders. When I say stakeholders, I do not mean representatives from so called **independent** recreational fishing bodies that rely on Government for funding. Nor do I mean strong well-funded lobby groups funded by Commercial Fishers.

**We need a non-Government funded body to achieve true independence.**

**"FIGURES DON'T LIE BUT LIARS USE FIGURES"**

Bob Wilson, Bairnsdale

## Don Cunningham's Bemm River Report



The Lake remains open, with some good tides helping to clear the water, which has been very discoloured until now.

Fishing has been steady with a good variety of fish being landed. Best bream are taking peeled prawn, with Wrigglers taking flathead down the channel. A few trevally and tailor are coming in the entrance, which is encouraging for our many visitors. Early morning has proved to be important, with the midday heat the least productive time to fish. Some good catches of bream and perch from snags in the River have been reported using lightly weighted Wrigglers.

Hard body lure anglers are having some success fishing around the weed beds in the Lake, taking bream up to 42cms. Dark coloured vibes have taken flathead and luderick down the channel. The surf has been a real challenge so far, with only a couple of good catches of salmon reported.

[Thanks to Don Cunningham for this on the spot report received on the 9<sup>th</sup> January.](#)

### Editor

At the March meeting of the Statewide Recreational Round Table March 14<sup>th</sup> 2014, Don Ellis of the Metropolitan Anglers Association raised the issue of access to the river at Bemm River, and the opening of the closed track. Fisheries Victoria undertook to investigate, "possible actions/improvements" to access. No report has been forthcoming and it seems that after 12 months nothing has been achieved. It is to be hoped that in the next twelve months Fisheries Victoria might have concrete actions and positive steps to improve angler access to these important waters. A good starting point would be a detailed discussion with Don Cunningham who has been involved with this issue since 1995.

## A Diary Angler Contributes to Fishing Knowledge.



Diary angler Bob McNeil's earliest memories of fishing were of being dinked on his father's bike as they went down to the Mitchell River for an afternoons fishing in the early 1940's. He recalls seeing massive schools of spawning fish in the Mitchell River and the silver of their backs as they moved upstream. The schools were a mixture of mullet and bream and it was at this time that boys, using a long stick and about 10ft of line, were able to catch these fish with ease. He fished the backwater and fish were swung over the shoulder onto the bank

Bob's love of fishing continued throughout his life with Christmas holidays spent on the Tathra estuary, and the September holidays at Bemm River. Bob was later woodwork teacher at Shepparton South Technical School and he was able to use the

school holidays to pursue his love of fishing. Whilst around Shepparton he fished local irrigation channels for redfin using yabbies as bait.

Twenty five years ago, he and his family shifted to Lakes Entrance and he taught at the Lakes Entrance Secondary School. The trips to Tathra and the Bemm continued and he had success at Tathra fishing on the blackest of nights for mulloway with his best fish going 27lb.

After ten years teaching at Lakes Entrance and in retirement, he was able to pursue his love of golf and fishing with great enthusiasm. Lake Tyers had become his great love and he religiously fished this estuary early morning twice a week.

Five years ago, he entered the Angler Diary scheme and over the intervening years, he has supplied a massive amount of information to Fisheries Victoria from his regular morning fishing outings, always commencing at around 6.00am summer and winter, and returning to the boat ramp at about 9.30-10.00. In that time with almost 500 mornings on the estuary, every fish caught was recorded, measured and other details provided which were then forwarded to Fisheries Victoria. In the last few years, we have published a summary of those reports and readers of this newsletter have looked forward to the details provided. I thank Bob for sharing this information with other recreational anglers.

I chatted to Bob about the changes he saw in Lake Tyers, and he immediately indicated that fishing in recent years had deteriorated with far fewer large dusky flathead being caught. In the 1990's it was relatively regular to catch these large flathead weighing between 7 and 12lbs. Today it is a rarity to catch such fish and boat movements and the use of soft plastics by anglers covering vast areas of the lake illustrate the pressure on fish stocks within the lake. Bream fishing has depended on the availability of year levels however in winter fishing the snags generally meant fish on the plate, but again the availability of this species was far greater in the 90's than today.

Bob noted a marked change in recent years has been the lack of recruitment into the lake of species during periods when the lake opened to the sea. Bob recalled gurnard, salmon, leather jackets, trevally and snapper previously regularly entering the estuary. At times, hundreds of small snapper entered the estuary and anglers were catching size snapper within a year or two as they grew within the closed estuary. There has been almost no recruitment from outside the estuary to Lake Tyers in the last five years, and so the fishery has become dependent on the dusky flathead and black bream whose life cycle is within the estuary. Bob recalled some years ago bagging out on King George whiting, however today it is extremely rare to hear of an angler catching this species. This has been a major change in this small estuary in recent years.

In relatively recent years, the amount of tailor in the estuary seems to have suffered a massive decline, and Bob believes there has been almost no recruitment of small tailor during periods when the estuary was open to the sea. Bob noted there were still a few tailor in the lake and only recently, he had been bitten off a couple of times, but this is nothing like the large schools of tailor seen chasing bait fish 3-4 years ago.

Bob has made a great contribution to Fisheries Victoria's knowledge of this estuary, and he continues to love the regular early morning outings in all weathers. So, if you are launching at No 2 ramp about 6.00am on either a Monday or Friday morning, chances are you will run into Diary Angler, Bob McNeil.

Oh, by the way Bob is a sprightly 83 year old!

## Diary Anglers

Over 300 volunteer anglers throughout Victoria are gathering information about fish stocks covering 90 species of fish with the aim of ensuring our fish stocks are harvested sustainably. The information provided to Fisheries Victoria can provide a measure of fish abundance, whilst the lengths of fish caught can be used to forecast the strength of the fishery in the years ahead. This program has been widely recognised, receiving the United Nations award for Marine and Coastal Management in 2011. Fisheries scientist Simon Conran is the Program Manager and was an initiator of this program involving recreational anglers across the state. Other states are examining this program with a view to its introduction following its success in Victoria.

## A Special Morning on Lake Tyers



On the 15<sup>th</sup> December, Graeme Merryful and his fishing mate Ken Corbett were fishing on Lake Tyers in the early morning. They were on the water at 5.30am. In the next couple of hours, they caught and landed two dusky flathead around the 10lb mark and one Graeme described as every bit of 12lbs. As well as these fish they were broken off by a fish of equally substantial size. The bait for this morning fishing was live mullet. Each of these large breeding female flathead were carefully returned to the water. The research of Gray and Barnes (2008) suggests each of these fish could produce between 300,000 and 400,000 eggs and they may be multiple spawners. In this morning's fishing, these two anglers may have contributed almost a million dusky flathead eggs to the estuary to help ensure a continuing fishery. They actually came home about 10.00am with seven dusky flathead between 40-55cms and with a nice 36cm bream. A

great morning's fishing, but above all it was satisfying to release these breeding female flathead.

For Lake Tyers anglers this catch was important, because there has seemed to be less large flathead caught in recent years. (See Bob McNeil's comment on this.) This morning's catch gives a sense of confidence to anglers when considering the future of this beautiful estuary.

This fishing needs to be compared to the Gippsland Lakes where Fisheries Victoria gives permission for the commercial fishermen to remove from their nets and sell the large (over 55cm) female dusky flathead. We wonder at the declining dusky flathead catch in the Gippsland Lakes. Commercial Fishermen could be destroying millions of dusky flathead when the large fish are removed, and it is strange to consider that large flathead released by recreational anglers may be caught and sold legally by commercial fishermen.

I had another report from angler Bruce Kneebone of Wangaratta who on a 19 day visit to Lake Tyers in late October landed an 82, 77, 73 and 71cms dusky flathead as well as an exceptional bag of other flathead. Bruce does not eat fish and just fishes for the sport and as a result, almost all flathead were returned. Bruce caught most of these fish on large soft plastics. Again, flathead anglers will be pleased to see these large female flathead included in his catch and released. He did also indicate that he only caught two undersized flathead, but put that down to the large soft plastics he was using. **Of particular interest was the catch of a 32cm estuary perch in the Toorloo Arm. (See item on the stocking of this species in Lake Tyers.)**

## The Dilemma of Dusky Flathead and the Gippsland Lakes

The issue of the current status of dusky flathead in the Gippsland Lakes continues to be confusing. We know that the commercial catch of this species has declined from 48 tonnes in 2005/6 to a mere 8 tonnes in 2012/13, which is a decline of 84%, and this occurred when flathead prices were at a high level, reaching \$50 per kilo for flathead tails at Melbourne fish markets. (Box Hill). The commercial catch provides an indicator of the availability of this species.

Prior to Christmas, I had a phone call from reader Alex Milledge with the query, "What has happened to the flathead in the Gippsland lakes." Alex's home is on Shaving Point and he, over recent years, has had little trouble catching flathead off his jetty. Alex complained that he had not caught a flathead off his jetty in the past six months. At the moment, there is no fishing taking place in the areas around Shaving Point, a sure sign of few fish. I spoke to a chap who had regularly fished off the bank at Shaving Point over a four-week period with odd catches of bream and whiting, but not a dusky flathead in the same period.

Over recent months I have spoken to a number of anglers retrieving their boats at Shaving Point and have not received a single report of catches of dusky flathead, and apart from occasional small tailor catches their return from hours of fishing have been minimal.

Now, whilst this has been my experience on the 25<sup>th</sup> November I received the following from Tim Bull MLA- "*Lynton, I went out on Saturday, and just wanted to dispel any thoughts the dusky flathead population are in any trouble as seeing is believing.. We walked around Pelican Island and then did over a*



kilometre at the Silvershot opposite Shaving Point. At Pelican Island alone we estimated seeing over 100 dusky flathead up to 7lbs, and an abundance of prawns, sand whiting, garfish and mullet. Another positive was only seeing around half a dozen shore crabs with numbers seemingly less than at any time in the last decade. I will keep a close eye on their numbers to see if they increase over summer as we only visited two locations. However the trip has dispelled any thoughts the duskies are in trouble as there were also good numbers at the Silvershot.”

I thank Tim for this report, which adds to the dilemma of just what is the situation of the dusky flathead in the Gippsland Lakes. I would be most interested to get further reports from readers on this issue, which seems so unclear from a recreational point of view, yet the commercial catch indicates a massive decline in this species over recent years. I look forward to hearing from anglers.

### **Dusky Flathead Research Project**

This dilemma makes the research project of Tara Hicks most important as it will deal with the reproduction of dusky flathead in East Gippsland and this project includes the Gippsland Lakes. Many recreational anglers are assisting with the project by providing filleted female fish frames. The information gained from this study will contribute to the long-term sustainable management of the dusky flathead fishery in East Gippsland.

### **Bass in the Nicholson River**



Reports from Fisheries Victoria indicate that in the past twelve months 120,000 Australian bass have been released in Gippsland lakes and rivers. Fisheries are to be congratulated on these releases, however readers may recall that with due publicity 100,000 bass **were to be released** into the Nicholson River. At the time of the announcement, (4<sup>th</sup> December 2012) 30,000 bass fingerlings were released (See Photo, left, with Fisheries Officer, Mark Fletcher and Margaret and Ken Bradley of the Nicholson Angling Club )

In 2014, a further 10,000 were released. However, a problem became evident in that a weir on the Nicholson would stop the movement of these fish to the Gippsland Lakes to spawn. As a

result, it would appear the announcement of a 100,000 stocking of bass in this river no longer applies. Despite calls for removal of the dam or the provision of a fish ladder, nothing has been done to provide access for these fish to the Gippsland Lakes. In November 2013 local member Tim Bull MLA stated in answer to a question, **“the state was contributing \$2 million to an East Gippsland Water proposal to remove the dam with East Gippsland Water and the Federal Government also contributing. This did not eventuate as a result of the Federal funding being withdrawn.”**

**I wonder why with a local Federal member namely Darren Chester MHR, together with the state member Tim Bull, that funding was not initiated by the State and Federal Coalition Governments to provide an answer to the problem which would resolve the issue and ensure the future of bass in this beautiful river.**

The removal of this dam would have a major positive influence on the large Nicholson Angling Club, which currently no longer has specific fishing competitions on the Nicholson River due to a lack of fish stocks. A Federal offer of funding for this project may encourage the new Labor Government to contribute to this project also, which would ensure continued stocking of this river.

Anthony Foster, Freshwater Fisheries Manager, stated in a letter (January 2013) that *“It was always envisaged the establishment of a population of bass in the Nicholson above the weir would create “a mountain to the sea” self sustaining bass fishery over time in the event that the weir is eventually removed.”* The fact is that it was envisaged the weir would be removed, but this has not occurred, Nor does it seem that any authority is interested in the removal of the weir or the provision of a fish ladder. The mountain to the sea is a great concept with one major problem , and that is a redundant weir that no longer serves any purpose,

which has been left in this river. This weir will continue to thwart any development of a self sustaining bass fishery. **Perhaps its time that local politicians, Gippsland Water, and the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority got together and came up with a plan to restore the Nicholson River to its former state before this weir was constructed.** (See attached statement from East Gippsland Water.)

The Mitchell River and Tambo River each received 10,000 bass fingerlings during 2014. Since 2002 Fisheries Victoria has stocked more than 570,000 Australian bass fingerlings into Gippsland lakes and rivers.

#### **A Comment from East Gippsland Water 4<sup>th</sup> January 2012 (3 Years Ago)**

*“East Gippsland Water is committed to protecting and restoring the natural environment. That is why, some months ago we initiated the approvals process to decommission the redundant Nicholson Dam structure, to help restore the natural environment of the Nicholson River and the surrounding catchment area. This is good news for anglers and tourists who visit the area restoring connectivity of the rivers upper catchment and the lakes.”*

(A letter from Frank McShane Executive Manager Operations East Gippsland Water to Around the Jetties 2012.)

#### **New Jetty at Fisherman’s Landing**

A contract has been let by the East Gippsland Shire Council for the design and construction of the Fisherman’s Landing Jetty, Lake Tyers Beach, at a cost of \$221,260. It is said this will replace the current jetty, which has been condemned and will be removed and replaced with “a jetty that will improve mooring opportunities and accessibility.” This jetty will also provide an area of access for anglers, and particularly the elderly and handicapped. It will also provide an opportunity for those anglers who fish for luderick, which at times were around the old jetty in considerable numbers.

#### **Is the Stocking of Estuary Perch in the Lake Tyers Estuary a Forgotten Project?**

##### **Estuary Perch Movement and Habitat in the Snowy River**

The following is taken from the above report February 2010 by J. Douglas Recreational (Fishing Grant program Research Report.)

*“For many years estuary perch were virtually unknown except to a few anglers, and even today are generally not caught by the many recreational fishers. However this is rapidly changing as fishery publications report estuary perch angling in articles, and Victorian anglers look for sportfish close to home.”*

Given the above, from an official Fisheries Victoria Research Report, I was very pleased to have recently received the following important letter from Ron Brymer, a keen recreational angler who over the years has contributed a number of thought provoking letters and articles to this angling newsletter. This letter is a short report of fishing on Lake Tyers on Xmas Eve 2014. **Anglers should now carefully read this report.**

*“We headed out after the morning rains on an overcast and dull cloudy day, bypassed the flatties and headed up the arm as my grandson Campbell wanted to “snag bash” for a few bream. As it turned out we were to get a surprise with the first fish boated being a nice estuary perch around legal size. This fish was followed by a few more to a max of 30cms or so and many hits, missed or broken on the strike. The fish were in 12-16 feet of water and deep in the timber. We were using 8lb FC Rock leader, which is as tough as old boots but the barnacles cut it to shreds on the strike several times. The fish were spread over a bout 1km of bank. I also believe there were quite a few smaller EP in the sticks as we got lots of the characteristic “taps” but I suspect our lures may have been a bit big for them. I did downsize the lure at the end of the session to take my best fish of the day.*

*These EP were not large but legal size- not that I would ever contemplate killing one as I prefer to go back and catch them again and again for the pleasure.*

*The session also produced quite a few bream with four great fish around the 38/40cm mark. Fantastic condition, dark from the tannin stained “fresh” from the rains, and they fought long and hard.*

*We finished the session with an hour or so on the duskies with several fish to 63cms (Andrew) and were home by 3.00pm.*

*I hope you find this report of interest and wish you both well for the coming year*

*Regards-Ron Brymer”*

Photos show Ron with a nice Bream and his grandson with an Estuary Perch

### Editor

This is a most important report as it provides current verified information on estuary perch in Lake Tyers, and more importantly the area fished covered over a kilometre of snags and bank, and there was a variety of year levels in the fish caught and released. This would seem to indicate that the waters and snags of Lake Tyers would provide habitat for estuary perch should they be stocked in Lake Tyers. We are also aware that the highest annual catch of estuary perch was 1505kgs, according to the 2007 Lake Tyers Fisheries Management Plan. This is a substantial catch of this species, proving that the estuary did once support considerable numbers of this species. In 2006, a number of local recreational anglers provided submissions to the Management Plan Steering Committee that included a request for a stocking of estuary perch. The Steering Committee that assessed local submissions did not accede to the request for a stocking of estuary perch, but then there was no local angling representative on that committee, despite the area having strong angling clubs with a background of years of local knowledge.

The attitude of Fisheries Victoria to the request for a stocking of this species can be summed up in the following-

### Response of Fisheries Victoria Executive Director (18/5/2007) to the request for stocking of estuary perch in Lake Tyers.

“Feedback from recreational anglers indicated that estuary perch is currently not among the most popular target species in Lake Tyers. The limited available resources for Lake Tyers have therefore been focussed on black bream and dusky flathead, which were clearly highlighted as the most targeted recreational species.”

This was a strange response from the Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria at that time, Dr Peter Appleford. Of course, estuary perch was not one of the most targeted fish in Lake Tyers because numbers since the 1980's have declined. This was the reason to seek a restocking and the same argument applies today.

### Current Policy of Fisheries Victoria in Relation to Estuary Perch

#### An Anglers Assessment

Fisheries Victoria first seems to have stocked estuary perch in a trial in Lake Hamilton in the Western District in 1999, however it was not until 2012 that the current major stocking of estuary perch commenced in Western Victorian lakes. The aim was to stock 150,000 estuary perch fingerlings over three years commencing 2012. The stocking figures published by Fisheries Victoria, suggest almost 250,000 estuary perch have been released almost entirely in Western Victorian lakes. As these fish will not be able to spawn it would seem that in the future to maintain these lake fisheries, **ongoing stocking will be necessary**. This project was funded from the State Governments Recreational Fishing Initiative (\$100,000) and Recreational Fishing Licence Funds (\$150,000). Estuary perch brood stock were caught in the Glenelg and Hopkins Rivers by expert recreational anglers, and these fish were flown to the Narooma Hatchery where large-scale production of estuary fingerlings takes place.

It would seem that Lake Tyers offers Fisheries Victoria the alternative option of possibly establishing a self-sustaining fishery in a proven area of habitat suitable for estuary perch. The question remains as to whether Fisheries Victoria will accept this challenge or will it continue the policy of stocking Western District lakes that will never have a sustainable fishery without long term continued stocking. **The Brymer report on estuary perch becomes most important when considering whether Lake Tyers provides habitat and conditions suitable for stocking of estuary perch.** It should also be remembered that other estuaries along the East Gippsland coast may provide habitat suitable for a self- sustaining perch fisheries.



In recent days, a 14 page report has been made available entitled, “Investigating the historical abundance of estuary perch in Lake Tyers.” Copies of this report can be obtained by phoning 136 186. Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club obtained a small grant from RFL fund and this was used by Fisheries Victoria to research the historical background to estuary perch in Lake Tyers. A detailed examination of this report will be published in

the next issue of Around the Jetties together with more information from Ron Brymer, and Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club.

Could Fish like this 'Big Mama' 52cm be found in Lake Tyers in the future

### VRFish News



VRFish reported on the December Board Meeting held at Lake Mulwala, which coincided with the Cod Classic. The Cod Classic was attended by more than 25,000 cod fishers from all Eastern States. The new cod limits applied to this event. A large number of Murray Cod were caught and released over the weekend. Indicating stocks are in a healthy condition. The VRFish News also reported on the process of setting research priorities for 2016. Anglers will have until the 8<sup>th</sup> February 2015 to put forward suggested research priorities. There is a survey to help guide the direction of Research and development, which may be accessed, via the link below.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/vicFRAB2016>

#### Editor.

This publication supports the need for continued research and urges clubs and anglers to provide Fisheries Victoria with research priorities. It is to be hoped that the research branch of Fisheries Victoria will have the Fisheries Scientists to carry out research requests. The following item appeared **in Issue 70 of Around the Jetties (July 2013)**

### Fisheries Research

*"I was talking to a Fisheries Victoria scientist some weeks ago and he indicated that the figure predicted by scientist Joel Williams, (Around the Jetties Issue 63 Nov.2012) that the number of fisheries researchers would be reduced from thirty to just fourteen, at Fisheries Queenscliff is proving correct. It was suggested that this number of researchers would not be able to monitor and collect data on all marine and freshwater fisheries, as it would just be logistically impossible. I would think serious anglers would be most concerned at these cutbacks in a vital area given it is a time when fish stocks are under ever increasing pressure."*

Perhaps VRFish should be seeking some guarantee that Fisheries will have a research capacity to service over 700,000 recreational anglers in this state.

### Surf Fishing and the Maasbanker-

#### An Unresolved Issue after a Decade of Inaction

Recently when reading from my file of newspaper cuttings I came across this letter printed in the **Bairnsdale Advertiser 14<sup>th</sup> March 2003** from a H. Zudwig from Frankston.

*Sir,*

*My family and myself have holidayed in the Lakes Entrance vicinity for 12 years now, our main attraction being fishing. We are getting very disheartened by the decreasing numbers of fish in this area. We feel something should be done about this before it is too late, both for the fish and the businesses of the area, which suffer great losses.*

*One of the solutions might be to regulate the distance of how close the netters can come to the surf beaches. We have witnessed many times netting boats very close to the beach and afterwards nothing can be caught surf fishing for days.*

*Surely some compromise could be made, we know the netters have to make a living but the non- professional anglers spend a large amount of money on trying to catch a fish eg. bait and tackle, and food and accommodation. Are the days of catching a large salmon on the surf beach just a memory?. I'm no greenie just a holiday maker asking for a fair go! Small mullet and crabs do not make dreams. Casting at the trawler 100 metres off shore might be more fun, I care. Do you? H.Zudwig*



**The Answer to this Problem is an Exclusion Zone for Netting.**

**The Maasbanker in operation, almost on the shore.**

Over a decade has passed and nothing has changed.

What of an Exclusion Zone for Netting on Surf Beaches?

This could be a challenge for the new Government.

## **Around the Jetties on Line**

Around the Jetties can be sourced on the Lake Tyers beach website- [www.laketyersbeach.net.au](http://www.laketyersbeach.net.au)  
The newsletter will still be emailed to readers and of course those who do not have access to email facilities will still receive hard copies

**Readers- Don't forget you may get a friend or an interested angler onto the mailing list for Around the Jetties by simply sending us an email with details of the person you are nominating and his email address or a letter with details of a mailing address. We do not advertise but rely on readers talking to others and the number of readers just continues to increase.**

**On a personal note - Thank you to all those readers who have contacted either Dawn or me to enquire about my health. I survived surgery and am going along well, improving each day and regaining my weight. Thank you for your concern.**

**Knowing how important both are in my own life, I wish you Good Health and Good fishing**