



# the tight line

**Bass**

**Bream**

**Jacks**

**Spotties**

**Tackle**

**Vol 1**

## The Tight Line Emag Vol 1

It was some time ago now that we were discussing ways that we communicate information to anglers. We wanted to be able to write articles of the length and detail that subjects often required. Also the rate of change in fishing techniques and tackle has really galloped along in recent years. When we first started Fish Head in 2003, it coincided with the explosion of soft plastics fishing around Australia. Since then we've seen the incredible rise of lure fishing in general, the resurgence of hardbody lures, deep water jigging, popping for GT's, the tournament scene, monster dam barra and an avalanche of quality light weight fishing tackle.

Several months after our first discussions and a very steep learning curve later, we have realised that a) making magazines is harder we thought and b) we still have a lot to learn. In this first issue we have stories from myself, fellow Fish Head staff members Gordon Low and Tom Slater as well as Dan Fisher, a fanatical angler from Northern NSW.

Cheers

Duncan O'Connell

Fish Head





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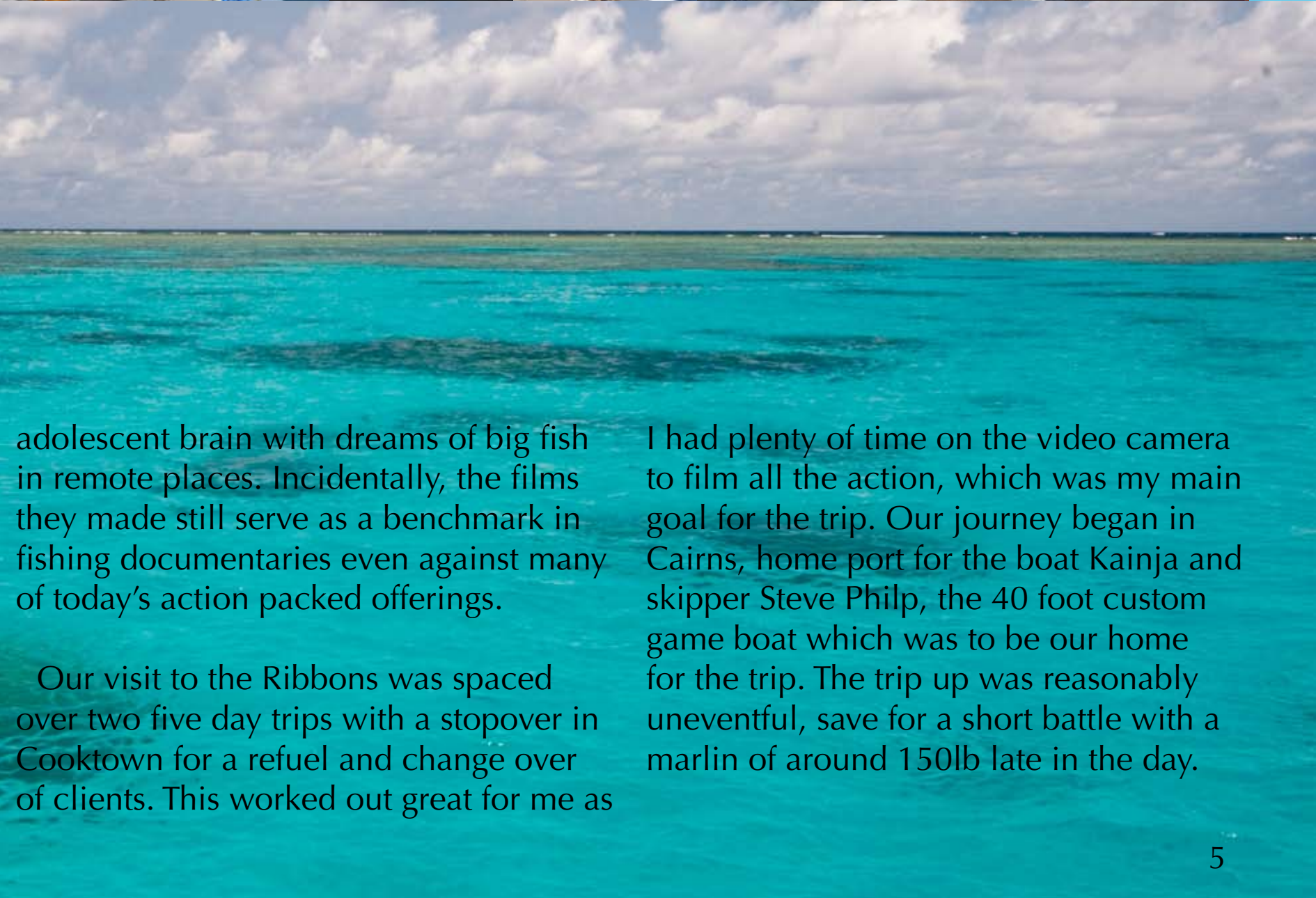
# The Ribbons

By Duncan O'Connell



Living in Australia presents many opportunities for the travelling angler. From oceans to mountain creeks and hot tropics to cool temperate latitudes, there is something to excite anyone with the urge to pick up a rod and reel. One area that has always stuck in my mind since an early age has been the Ribbon Reefs north of Cairns. Some 60km east of Cooktown is the southern most point. The

reef then stretches as the name suggests, like a ribbon 110km to the north, finishing just off Lizard Island. I first heard about the Ribbons while watching Malcolm Florence videos back in the eighties as they jigged and trolled their way through the northern tropics. The gear was antique by today's standards but the fish they caught were pretty impressive. Trout, cod, marlin and others all filled my



adolescent brain with dreams of big fish in remote places. Incidentally, the films they made still serve as a benchmark in fishing documentaries even against many of today's action packed offerings.

Our visit to the Ribbons was spaced over two five day trips with a stopover in Cooktown for a refuel and change over of clients. This worked out great for me as

I had plenty of time on the video camera to film all the action, which was my main goal for the trip. Our journey began in Cairns, home port for the boat Kainja and skipper Steve Philp, the 40 foot custom game boat which was to be our home for the trip. The trip up was reasonably uneventful, save for a short battle with a marlin of around 150lb late in the day.

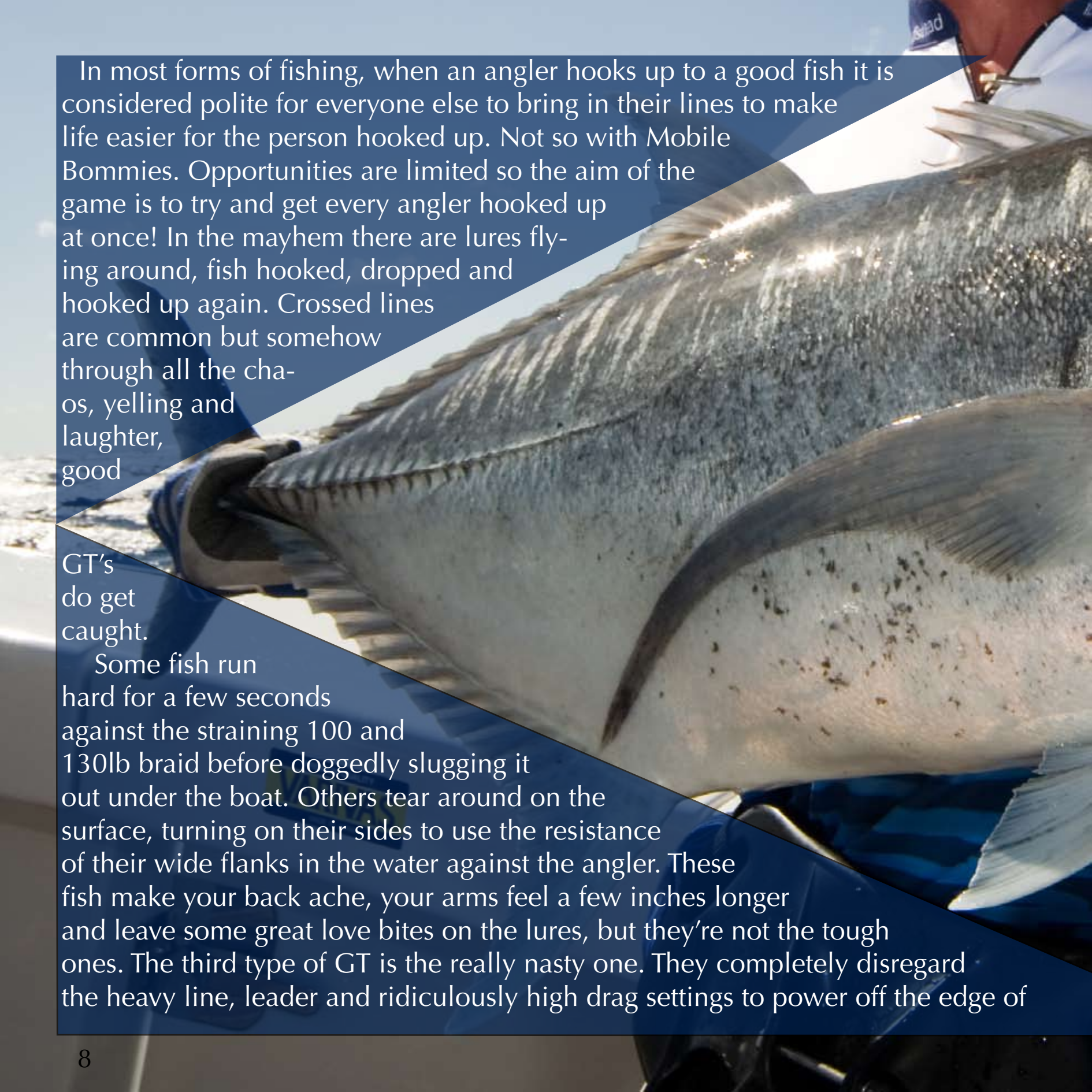




Popper fishing for GT's was the main aim of the trip with afternoons spent chasing some of the giant black marlin that inhabit the area. The days generally began by chasing bait for the afternoon trolling session. For anyone who hasn't done this style of fishing before, it always an eye opener when a perfectly good feed-everyone-on-board size Spanish mackerel or yellowfin tuna comes aboard, only to have it declared bait!

After bait collecting we popper fished our way along the reef edges for GT's and all of the other interesting critters that call the reef home, until after lunch when we pulled out the big baits for the afternoon trolling session.

Early in the week we were blessed with fine weather and roaming packs for GT's, known up here as 'mobile bommies'. From a distance they look like another dark piece of reef or a bommie sticking out, as the boat gets closer it becomes apparent that the patch of reef is moving. The first cast to land within 10m or so of the mobile bommie usually sees a trail of black shapes peel away from the group like fighter planes on a search and destroy mission. One huge boof, like a small car being dropped on the water, the lure disappears in a foaming hole and the fish is on. After that, the rest of the GT's are hyped and any angler who can get a lure near the fish gets comprehensively belted.



In most forms of fishing, when an angler hooks up to a good fish it is considered polite for everyone else to bring in their lines to make life easier for the person hooked up. Not so with Mobile Bommies. Opportunities are limited so the aim of the game is to try and get every angler hooked up at once! In the mayhem there are lures flying around, fish hooked, dropped and hooked up again. Crossed lines are common but somehow through all the chaos, yelling and laughter, good

GT's do get caught.

Some fish run hard for a few seconds against the straining 100 and 130lb braid before doggedly slugging it out under the boat. Others tear around on the surface, turning on their sides to use the resistance of their wide flanks in the water against the angler. These fish make your back ache, your arms feel a few inches longer and leave some great love bites on the lures, but they're not the tough ones. The third type of GT is the really nasty one. They completely disregard the heavy line, leader and ridiculously high drag settings to power off the edge of





the reef and down into the depths. Once down on the bottom, there are a small forest of sharp edged rock and coral for the fish to destroy the angler on. A few of these fish are dragged back up to the top, but mostly it is a only a tattered piece of braid or shredded leader that comes back. Before this trip I had successfully used 330lb mono for the heavy bite tippet on the end of the line, but after suffering a number of bust offs from coral and gill plates, I'm thinking that 500lb might be just the thing I need!

During the first week of our trip, the GT's and other assorted reef-fishes that grabbed our lures mostly played by the book. Watch the fish come up on you lure in the calm conditions, hook 'em up, steer the boat towards deep water and with a bit of luck, put the fish in the boat a few minutes later. This is an extremely enjoyable way to fish and also makes a great spectator sport for everyone else on board. By contrast, the second week was rough, windy and the fun fish had been replaced by the tackle destroying 'Type 3' personality GT's. Many of the fights followed the flowing script: hook up, hold on, try to screw up an al-



ready tight drag, try to tow fish out off the reef, once you do get it there, try to stop the fish peeling line like there is no drag before it hits bottom 30 or 40m down!



Popper fishing in rough weather can be an interesting exercise. If you go out trolling in less than ideal conditions, there is usually an option to travel more or less with the swell or against it. This way the anglers can get the most comfortable ride possible in the conditions. GT fishing on the outside of the Barrier Reef offers no such flexibility. Casting along the edge of the reef puts the boat side-on to the waves, magnifying the effects of a rollicking 2.5-3m swell. Bumps, bruises and the occasional tumble were all part and parcel of each day as the boat pitched and rolled it's way up and down the edge. Captain Steve Philip expertly piloted the 40' boat among the rugged blue peaks, allowing us to cast up onto the backs of the big waves before they thundered onto the reef edge. If you're thinking that this story is going to culminate in the overcoming of all the conditions to land a true monster class GT, then unfortunately that is not the



case. However, we did land a stack of good trevally up to 30 kilos as well as multitudes of red bass, coral trout, Spanish mackerel and the elusive maori wrasse.

Rather than the big trevally which we set out to catch, it turned out to be big black marlin, which made the end of the trip,. The last two days saw a number of fish up to 700lb crashing the baits and really stretching the 130lb Dacron. This is a totally different style of fishing to the intense smash and grab of the trevally . It is a real team

event where skipper, deckie and angler work together to bring the huge fish to the transom. Seeing a big marlin jumping close to the boat is an experience not easily forgotten and it has been bringing anglers back to these waters for many years. Scott Trigger had a great fight with the fish pictured here. the black, estimated at 650lb did all the things you would hope a great gamefish would do. It saved the best performance until last when Tim Wagner, our deckie, had the leader in hand, jumping and tailwalking around the transom until the leader finally broke.

Trips to remote places are always eventful, sometimes for the fish landed and sometimes for the ones that got away. This trip had equal measures of both, which for me guarantees that this visit to the Ribbons will not be the last!



## Megabass OrPoi (floating)

This limited edition lure from the Megabass range is designed with dolphinfish, tunas and kingfish in mind. It is a floating lure with an excellent darting and rolling action. Made of high strength ABS and heavy through-wire, it features the kind of finish that we have come to expect from Megabass.



## Patriot Designs Masterd Bomb 135

The 135 Masterd Bomb has fast become one of the most popular GT poppers around, due to its ease of use, durability and the fabulous 'Thoomp!' sound it makes in the water to attract big GT's. The 135g model has the same dimensions as the 155, but in a smaller weight to suit more mid weight GT rods



## Lucky Craft Tango

The Tango is a 45mm minnow which works great on bream, bass and jacks. Being a little larger than your average bream lure it is good for attracting quality fish in the creek or canal.

Because the author can't catch decent jacks, I have added a picture of a tiddler caught on the Tango, but rest assured the lures can catch better fish than this!



## Bills Bugs Fizzers

Not a new product, but one which has had a resurgence in recent times as a go-to lure for big barra over weedbeds in the impoundments. The spinning propellers seem to have a fatal attraction for barra in both river and dam environments. They are also killers on bass, trevally and kingfish. Available in a variety of sizes.

## Maria Metal Flicker

Metal flicker jigs have been around for a little while now and they have proven themselves as a superb lure on the shallow off-shore reefs. The species list for the Metal flicker on Brisbane reefs include spangled emperor, grass sweetlip, snapper, mackerel, various tunas and pearl perch.



## Daiwa Steez 2004 »

To complete the Steez lineup of reels in Australia, Daiwa released the 2004 size late last year. It has proven to be a superb ultralight reel for bream, bass and trout fishing. Unlike the Japanese domestic version, this reel is ideal for light saltwater applications. If you are looking for the ultimate in lightweight spinning reels, then this is it!



## FCL Jigs»

Tsurusaki san of FCLLABO is one of the most innovative designers of lures today. The SLC, SL, VM and LB jig designs just keep on catching when the fish have seen it all! The SL jig pictured is ideal with slow jigging styles for catching big amberjack, samsons and kingfish.



## Shout Bobbin Knotter »

The bobbin knotter allows anglers to tie the PR knot - an almost seamless join between braid and leader. It can be used for a variety of line weights, depending on the model. The amazing part of this is the adjustable drag system to set tension on the line.

## Authors Profiles



### Tom on

### Dan

The aptly named Daniel Fisher has been a

good friend of mine ever since I met him out and about walking the banks of the Brisbane River. Since that time I have lost count of the amount of great fishing sessions we have had together on everything from Threadfin Salmon to Bass.

Daniel puts a lot of time and thought into his fishing, mainly in the way that he fishes for different species. Instead of sticking with standard methods, Dan will quite regularly make changes, trying new and exciting lures or techniques to always keep it interesting. Sometimes it pays off and some outstanding fish are caught. Other times, well, the opposite occurs - but at least the fishing is never dull!

Living on the pristine Northern coast of NSW Dan spends a lot of his time out on

the water. Whether it be chasing Jack's in the rivers or throwing poppers for greenbacks off Byron Heads he is usually out there somewhere.

A welcome addition to the writing team here at Fish Head I am sure there will be plenty more great articles to come.

### Gordon on Tom



Though Tom is the youngest member of the Fish Head team, his encyclopedic knowledge of lures and high-end Japanese tackle reflect his burning passion for fishing. From competing in the ABT bream tournaments to cracking the secrets of the illusive Brisbane River threadfin, Tom puts a great deal of thought into tackle and techniques and this has resulted in some pretty awesome captures including the 130cm

threadfin he caught in 2009. Recent forays offshore to learn more about the jigging and popping we're all so passionate about here at Fish Head have left him bruised and battered but hasn't decreased his enthusiasm at all.

Asked what his favourite kind of fishing is Tom feels, at the moment, it's pretty hard to beat the seclusion and challenge of targeting huge wild bass in the headwaters of NSW's north coast rivers. I'm sure the opportunity to try out all the cool new bass lures he has been collecting has something to do with this.

In the shop, you'll usually find Tom slurping on a frozen coke in front of the computer while answering technical questions for our online customers or sharing his excitement for the latest Japanese imports to hit

the shelf with anyone interested.

### **Tom On Gordon**

Here's one for ya, what's 6'6" 130kg but can place a fly so delicately in front of a feeding golden, you would think it fell from heaven? No clues? Well, that would be Gordo of course!

Joining the team in December of 2006, he has experienced pretty much everything there is to try when it comes to fishing this lovely country of ours so he is pretty knowledgeable when it comes to serving customers in the shop.

Gordon's true passion has always been for fly. Waving the wand like the best of them, he is certainly no slouch when it comes to throwing a full line. Running the casting lessons through the shop I'm sure he has tutored more than a few people on their way to doing the same.

Spending time between the shop and out on the bay skippering the charter operation, Gordo has become somewhat of an encyclopedia when it comes to Moreton bay. Everything from Tuna to big hump headed snapper have seen the inside of the Fish Head boat on many occasions, much to the delight of his customers.





*Bass*

*and*

*Bream*

*on*

*Cicadas*

*By Dan Fisher*

Flicking small floating lures under overhanging branches is a common method for chasing surface feeding bass and bream. Many East Coast anglers know of these species' fondness for terrestrial food sources and have long enjoyed the heart stopping boofs, kisses and sips that punctuate this style of fishing. Due to Australia's fast growing tournament fishing scene the popularity of chasing bream and bass on artificial presentations has grown considerably in recent years. Heavily populated areas are now receiving lots of angling pressure and consequently the fish are becoming harder to fool.

Many of us who have cast our "topwaters" into structure that we know holds fish will understand the frustration of a refusal. Bream in particular will regularly follow a surface presentation right out of their home, dart around inspecting it from every angle and all too often decide they don't like what they see and disappear. They have decided something isn't quite right about the situation and will be very hard to tempt into a second inquiry.

For many situations the solution can be found by closely imitating the food source these fish are expecting. Lure

manufactures such as Tiemco and Megabass have developed ultra realistic lures matching the profile of a fallen cicada perfectly. The good news is not only do they look like a cicada, they can also be twitched, blooped and rolled to make them behave and sound like a drowning insect desperately trying to escape the inevitable.

Each spring, hordes of cicada nymphs will leave their underground homes and rise to the surface beginning their brief and tumultuous cameo in the outside world. Over just a few weeks they feed on plant sap and search out a mate before their life cycle ends. There are over two hundred species of cicadas in Australia and each have an individual sound they use to identify themselves to potential mates of the same kind.

The Megabass Siglett and its bigger brother the Grand Siglett are the premium cicada imitations on the market. The manufacturer reports the internal tungsten alloy balancer is tuned to mimic the sound of the Higurashi cicada of Japan. At a glance, one could be forgiven for mistaking this lure for a real insect with its life like fur underbelly and soft but

functional wings. Not far behind are the Tiemco soft and hard shell cicada imitations with a similar design. They are also highly realistic but hold a few key differences giving each their own benefits for different situations.

Bream and bass will often feed on very similar food sources, however their behaviour and feeding styles can be very different. Through the warmer months bream will willingly attack a well presented surface lure any time of the day. Bass can also be caught on surface throughout the day if there is sufficient overhead shade, though they usually hit the surface more actively in the lower light stages. For both species, well executed and carefully considered casts will produce a great increase in strikes when the sun is out and the majority of



water you are fishing is exposed to bright light.

The key to fishing with cicadas is to understand that fish expecting terrestrial offerings will be alert to any presentation that is convincing in its placement. Bearing this in mind when fishing with cicadas will see a great increase in hits. It sounds obvious but the more closely you follow this theory the more success you will have. As an example, a lure landing fifteen centimetres from a shaded rocky bank is far less likely to be eaten than one that actually bounces off the rock and lands at the very point where water meets land. Furthermore, flicking a cicada under an overhanging branch is a great start, though the further you can skip it in towards the bank the more ac-

tion you will get. Bream and bass focus their attention towards anything that may land in the water as easy prey, so if your lure falls in after tapping the bank, or at least lands right on the edge it will be that little bit more convincing and natural.

At times small details like this can mean the difference between a refusal or half hearted inquiry and a suicidal explosion. Naturally anglers need to assess the structure to determine whether the lure will snag or foul up if it hits the bank and make a call for each cast. If submerged structure is present than you can also take this into account when choosing lure placement and vary methods to suit conditions.

We've covered where to cast your cicada lures but that's only the beginning. The beauty in the design of Megabass



and Tiemco's cicada imitations are that they offer a multitude of options for attracting strikes. This is where bream and bass begin to really differ in the ways you work these lures. Bream are mostly

a tentative feeder. At times they will aggressively attack your lure in actively feeding schools, but most often they will bite individually with a subtle kissing or sipping sound and a small splash. They are often spooked by an overly aggressive lure presentation and prefer to be "finessed" into biting. For the majority of situations a cast tight into structure as detailed above should be followed by gentle

twitching; try to keep the lure moving just a few centimetres with each action. With minimal practice an angler can impart an enticing wiggle to their cicadas

to fool a wary bream into rising up and pinning itself. The design of these lures allows them to hold in the strike zone for a very long time compared to most other lures. For bream, once your cicada is out of the strike zone standard practice is to then employ the lure's built in surface crawling action. This is done by simply cranking the reel handle and the lure will get up and wiggle along creating all sorts of noise and vibration. This won't usually draw a strike from a bream unless they are in a frenzy, but it is more natural than simply whipping the lure out and skipping it along. Once the lure is well away from fish holding structure quickly retrieve it and make another cast rather than wasting time working it over unproductive areas.

One of the trickiest and at times most frustrating elements of topwater breaming is the strike to hookup ratio. The great thing about cicada lures is they are so realistic you get a lot more chances than you do with stick baits or poppers. The most important rule when fishing cicada lures for bream is to resist the temptation to strike. It takes a lot of practice and self control but until you feel the fish's weight

you cannot strike or you will simply pull the lure away from the fish and more than



likely spook it. The best way to connect up to a bream that has attached itself to



your lure is a smooth lift of the rod tip to set the hook. Fine and sharp trebles are a



must for this style of fishing and an ultra light rod with a slower action than would

be used for most other breaming situations is recommended. Minimal force is required to set the hook, though keeping the fish pinned can be a challenge and the forgiving buffer of a slower actioned rod such as Daiwa's Saltist Light Rock Fish PE will go a long way to seeing more fish landed. The double treble configuration of the Tiemco Soft Shell Cicadas does lead to a better hookup rate on bream than the Siglett, however they will both draw a lot of strikes and the Siglett will still catch plenty of bream. The softer body of the Tiemco also seems to out fish its hard plastic cousin with again a better hookup rate. When the fish are timid, trebles are the best option. At other times a small single on the rear of a Tiemco can improve hookup to landed ratios, particularly if the fish are really active. The soft shell version of the Tiemco is also silent which can be useful when bream are being timid and easily spooked.

Bass are a funny fish and it could be said they almost have a personality to them in their behaviour towards lures. Whilst bream become educated that something isn't right within a couple of casts, bass can be the exact opposite. At

times it can seem as though a bass will hit a lure simply because you've invaded its territory one too many times and it can't stand it any longer. During peak bite times cicada lures can be so effective it will only take one or two casts to convince a bass to hit, but when they are being timid these lures can really come into their own. Unlike bream, you can put cast after cast into known bass structure and keep the lure blooping, chugging, popping and flapping away above their heads until it all becomes too much and ends in a loud boof with an explosion of water. Generally it is a good idea to make the first cast at a piece of structure much the same as you would when fishing for bream. Subtle twitches will often quickly draw a strike if there's an alert fish and your cast is in the right spot. The next



cast should be just as tight and follow the same rules as far as position goes, but can be followed by a more aggressive bloop getting both wings to spit water forward much like a popper. After this, make sure you chug the lure back making use of its in built crawling action and you'll often convince a bass to follow and strike. If you are confident there is a bass in the spot you're working keep at it as the bite will usually come soon enough, otherwise move on and keep following this process.

Once light levels drop to the point where the entire body of water is covered in shade things can get really hot. Bass will begin to feel more comfortable roaming around away from their homes and searching for disturbances on the water surface. Now you can be a little less ac-

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curate with your casting but it is still a good idea to aim for fish holding structure. It is less worthwhile at this stage to twitch and bloop and more effective to cast out and instantly get your lure crawling along the surface. Try and find a pace that really gets those wings splashing and making as much noise as possible. The Siglett can really fire here with its finely tuned rattle and one treble hook configuration. Whereas the double treble hook is undoubtedly a better system for bream, a single treble enables the implosion style strike of a bass to inhale more of the lure and actually increases your hookup rate. Thankfully the expanding wings stop the lure going too far into the throat preventing the fish from becoming gill hooked. The single treble is also great for less fouls ups when skip casting and a split ring on the tow point is better than tying a loop knot for the same reason.

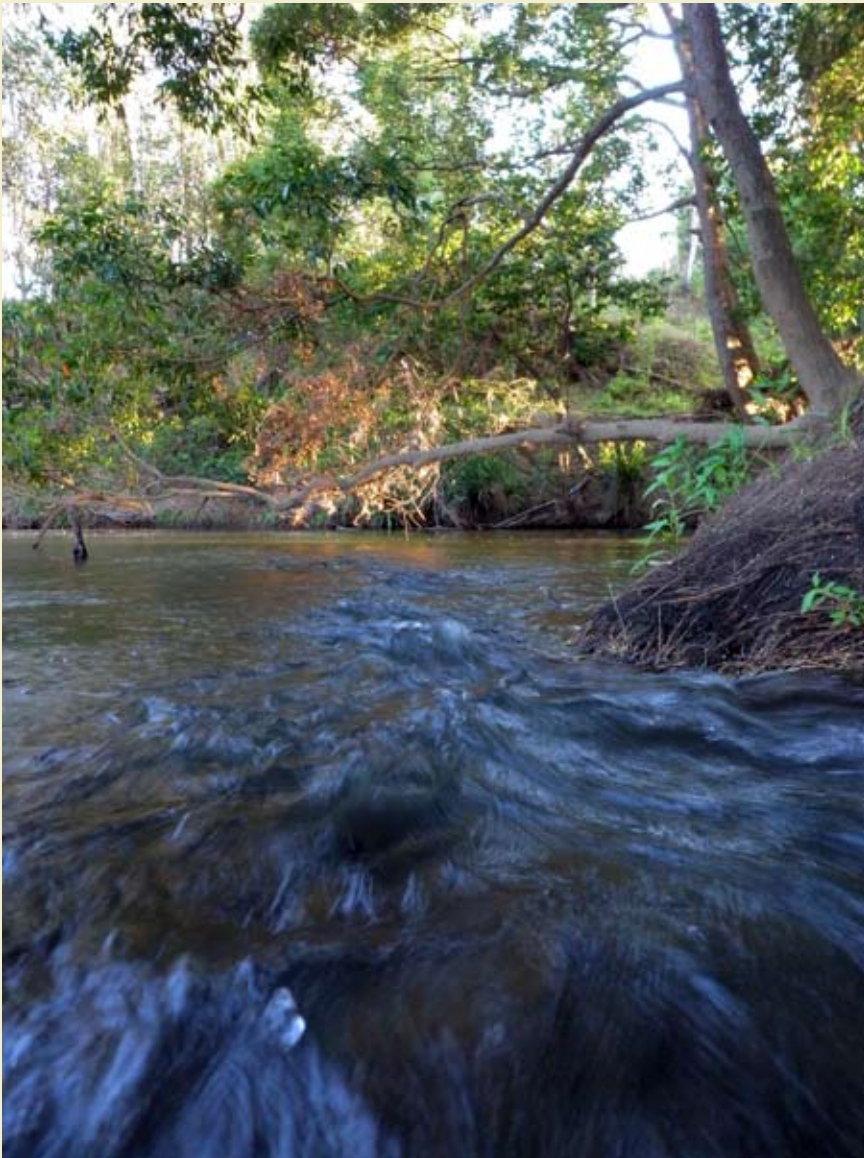
Though high end baitcasting outfits can be used for this style of fishing, quality spinning combos are far more practical. For bass fishing a light yet fast actioned rod of around six to six and a half foot is ideal, the majority of casts with this style of fishing will be underhanded skip casts

and anything longer can become cumbersome. This is especially true when trekking wild streams by foot as tree branches will make short work of a stray rod tip.

Daiwa's 2506 sized spinning reels are ideal as bream and bass will often strike your lure then swim towards you, the slightly faster pick up at this size means you can regain tension quickly and catch more fish. The finesse drag on the 2506 spools will allow you to maintain light hook sets on bream yet still have more than enough stopping power for bass. For both species braid of between four to eight pounds, with a monofilament leader of ten to fourteen pound will see you through most situations. If you're fishing especially nasty country use a heavier fluorocarbon leader but be aware that it sinks and will at times affect the action of the lures by dragging them down at the start of a retrieve.

Bream and bass are readily available to anglers in southern Queensland and much of New South Wales. Though the viability of surface fishing can vary amongst stocked impoundments, bass can be targeted with cicada lures anywhere they are found in the wild. Bream-

ing with cicadas is most effective in smaller brackish creeks and lakes with lots of overhanging trees and less current flow. As summer rolls on the cicada bite only gets better and by using the information in this article you can look forward to some rewarding and highly productive sessions this season.





# Seeing Spots!

For many anglers in south east Queensland, the annual run of Spotted Mackerel is an eagerly anticipated time on the fishing calendar. Particularly prized for their eating qualities, Spotties are also an excellent sportfish. They are powerful fighters with a blistering first run and their feeding behav-







our, often rounding up bait into tight balls on the surface before smashing through it in slashing showers of spray and terrified baitfish, makes very exciting fishing for any boat-based angler. Fly-anglers in particular get a great buzz out of this highly visible “sight-fishing”. They’re also one of the larger species that fly anglers regularly encounter in South East Queensland. Average fish tend to be in the 60-80 cm range but monsters over one metre and weighing several kilos are regularly encountered! The ability to produce flies closely matching the predominant baitfish, and having the means to easily present these relatively small offerings, means that fly anglers often have a distinct advantage over those using conventional tackle. Particularly when word gets out that the spotties are on. As angling pressure increases these keen-eyed fish can become very particular in regards to what they will eat. There have been many days when a well-tied surf candy would get eaten when the conventional slugs and trolled spoons don’t even get a look.

## Time of Year

On their southerly migratory run, the first Spotted Mackerel can hit south east Queensland as early as September. However, good numbers generally don't show up until December with the festive season often

being associated with the real run. How good the season is, and how long it lasts for, can depend on a range of factors including recruit-

ment, food supply and especially the weather. If all these are favourable then the fish can hang around until April and even as late as May.



A bait ball about to be carved up by a pack of spotties

## Where

It's one of the greatest fishing clichés; find the bait and you'll find the fish! But it certainly rings true. In this case, having an understanding of baitfish behaviour and how they're affected by weather and

tides can go a long way towards helping find the Mackerel. Baitfish generally head for calmer conditions so if the wind has been blowing from the one quarter

for a while it pays to start searching areas in the lee. A perfect example of this is South East Queensland's Moreton Bay. When the North-easterlies have been blowing for a while the lee side of Moreton Island (from Shark spit south) will

consistently hold good concentrations of bait and, in turn, predators. That said, locally their movements are also greatly influenced by the currents and tides so it pays to identify and search areas where sandbanks, reef or even man-made struc-

ture cre-  
ates ar-  
eas where  
baitfish  
become  
trapped or  
concentrated. The edges of extensive sandbanks or ends of major channels are a particularly good example where you will regularly find all kinds of predators capitalising on the confusion as baitfish are flushed into deeper water. When the tide turns you'll often get a second bite at the



Flies matching the baitfish will usually be eaten without hesitation

millling around is generally a sure sign that there is baitfish near the surface and this in turn usually means that there are pelagic predators under them. Baitfish don't tend to mill around on the surface,

cherry as the bait are again concentrated, pushed up against the sandbank edges or being funnelled back into the channels. These areas can be particularly productive through the bigger tides of the full and new moon phases when the bait are

even more at the mercy of the currents.

While you're moving between these areas already described, it always pays to be looking for birds. Birds

in peril of being picked off by seabirds, if there isn't a more tangible threat below them at the time. Pelagic predators tend to carve off workable "baitballs" from deeper schools and push them against the surface where they're easier to pick off. Spotties are particularly good at this and, if left undisturbed, can pack the bait into such a tight mass that they literally bulge above the surface in their desperation to get to the middle. This can be particularly spectacular on flat calm days when the surface isn't being broken by waves.

In these situations, anglers can hang off the action and pick fish off the edges. Unlike many other predators, Spotties often don't get spooked when one of their ranks gets dragged away from the fray. What will spook them though are rushed, noisy approaches or boats driving through the school.

### Boat driving and fishing tactics

One of the most important skills required for targeting Spotties, and any surface-feeding pelagics for that matter, is a





good understanding of how to approach them. The last thing you want to do is go charging up to the edge of a school and lob your fly in the middle. However, it's amazing the number of people that do this repeatedly and wonder why the fish disappear in one last frenzied splash as they drop off the plane... "Hmmm, I must have got here too late. Next time I'll drive even faster!"

How you approach the fish depends very much on how they are feeding at the time and how flighty they are on each particular day. How flighty they are can be a result of boat traffic and fishing pressure (Sundays can be a nightmare!), bait concentration and even time of day. Really you can't tell this until you've driven up to a school and spooked them. How the fish are feeding, along with the sea and weather conditions at the time, is what really governs how you should approach the fish.

The best scenario is on those "Red Letter" days when the water is millpond flat and the Mackerel have their prey

crammed into the aforementioned baitball. Approach these fish quietly and try and ascertain which direction the school is moving before closing in. Set the boat up so the action will pass by you rather than locking in a collision course (this



Birds circling: the fish aren't far away

way you may get several cracks at the school without disrupting the feeding) and put the breeze on the caster's good shoulder. The "good" shoulder being the one attached to the line hand rather than the rod hand. If you hang back at the

edge of comfortable casting range it will also help by giving you more time as the fish approach and reducing the chance of spooking the school. Put your first cast on the very edge of the frenzy and try a long steady strip. If this doesn't work, try the same presentation but with a faster retrieve. With each cast, systematically work deeper into the school, varying the retrieve each time. When the bait are really packed I've often found that dropping a fly right in the middle and letting it sink "dead-drift" through the baitball before smoothly drawing it back works when nothing else will.

When conditions are a bit rougher, or the fish are moving quickly, you'll need to pick up your game when it comes to setting up the shots. Fortunately, one of the great things about Mackerel (in fact, most pelagics) is that they will nearly always push the bait into the wind/waves. When they are

feeding quickly this gives you something predictable to work with and also means you can use the wind to your advantage as they feed towards you. A much better prospect than having to punch a cast into the teeth of a gale as the fish go whizzing past!

Again, get ahead of the school and set the caster up with the wind behind them and over their good shoulder. If possible, position the boat to let the school pass by the bow rather than intercepting it and, before the angler casts, swing the boat away to prevent it from drifting straight down the line as they try to retrieve line. In these situations, speed of retrieve can mean everything when it comes to getting the eat and coming up tight on a fish. As soon as the fly hits the water crank up your fastest double-handed strip and don't stop till the fly is out of the water or buried in the corner of a spottie's sharp jaws.

Now clear the line, lean back and get a good flat bend in the rod as the fish charges off on its lightning-fast opening

run. With suitable tackle and bit of good technique these fish tend to roll over pretty quickly after a few spirited charges but the fight is certainly exciting.

## Tackle

Most Spotted mackerel can be handled pretty comfortably on a rod as light as an eight weight. I tend to stick to a ten or even eleven weight simply because we regularly run into Longtail Tuna in the same areas we find the Spotties. Again, for the possible tuna encounter, a good quality reel with a smooth drag and 300 metres of gel-spun backing is ideal. If you're concentrating on the mackerel, 150 metres of backing will suffice (I don't think I've ever seen one run more than 100 metres) but you still want the smooth drag to handle their explosive runs.

A good quality Intermediate line such as Rio's "Saltwater I/I" or Scientific anglers' "Tarpon" will cover most situations. At the pointy end a basic two piece leader with a stiff, heavy butt and 8-10kg tip-pet will suffice but I've gotten into the

habit of using 20lb tapered leaders. It sounds pretty lazy (to a degree it is) but these leaders do turn over flies much better. I simply use a triple surgeons knot to attach a short shock of 40 or even 60 pound fluorocarbon and loop-knot the fly to this. Though expensive, the fluoro will certainly reduce the number of fly-losses and doesn't reduce hits like single-strand or knotable wire will. When it comes to Mackerel, damaged and lost flies are part of the package so it pays to keep them tough and simple.

## Fly selection

When it comes to flies for Spotted Mackerel, the surf candy reigns supreme! Tied on good sturdy 1/0 and 2/0 hooks, such as the Gamakatsu SL12s, in a selection of colours (olive over white being the most popular) you'll rarely need to tie anything else on. If you use tough synthetic materials such as DNA Holofusion or Supreme hair they'll last for several fish as the hard, coated head takes most of the punishment. You'll still get the occasional fly come back with a haircut so make sure you check your fly if you get a short strike followed by a refusal.

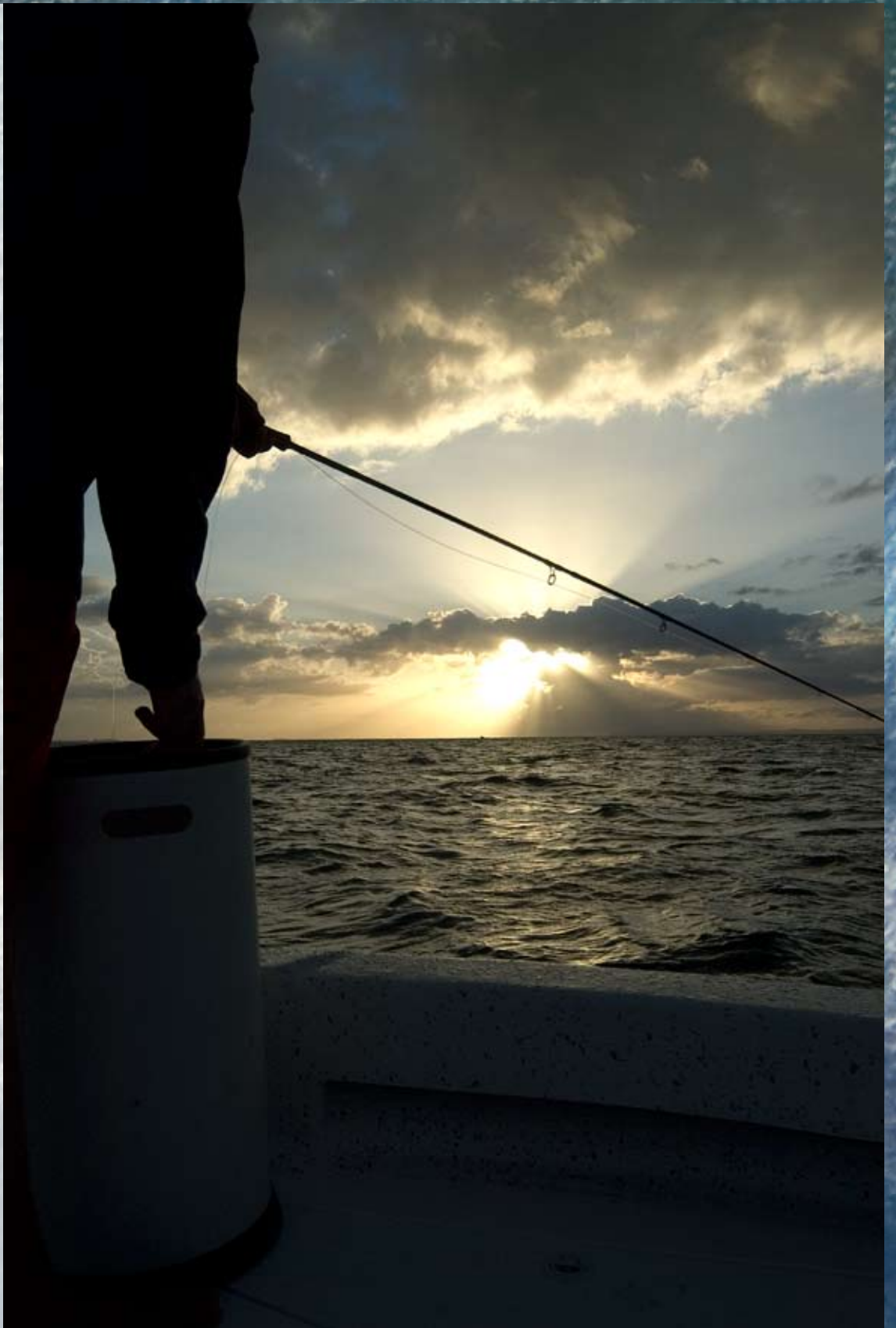
Other flies that can work when the fish are being a tough crowd are sparsely tied clousers or synthetic deceivers tied with more supple materials. Cast into the school and left to flutter down like an injured baitfish these can be deadly.





## A quick note on landing Mackerel

A common practice when landing mackerel is to reach over and tail the fish. This is obviously an uncomplicated way of approaching the task and I must admit I used to do it myself; until I had a close encounter with a bullshark that obviously wanted the fish more than me. I've since heard many similar stories and now make a point of having a net handy to land fish. A gaff will also do the job but the net gives you the opportunity to release the fish if you choose. If you're not going to eat your catch, grab a quick photo and get it back into the water as quickly as possible to increase its chances of survival. Preferably on the opposite side to where you last saw the shark!



## Sexy Egi's

A couple of very nice squid jigs to pass our way lately. The Megabass jig on top has a unique cloth which makes it reflect either Gold or purple depending on which direction you look at it from. The Sumizoku jig below has one of the most stunning translucent finishes we've seen in a squid jig and is sure to tempt any fussy squid



## Zenaq Bamboo Works

These rods take an otherwise standard Zenaq rod and turn them into works of art. Each graphite blank has been painted to look like a traditional bamboo rod. Along with the beautiful timber grips and machined reel seat, the result is stunning

## Monster SJ41

The Owner SJ41 has long been a popular hook for heavy duty jigging or as a single hook on GT poppers. Many people have commented that 11/0 as the largest size was too small for back-to-back 'Baker' rigs on poppers, so Owner has responded with a new monster 13/0 size!



## Sebile In Australia »

Finally after a long wait, Sebile lures have hit our shores! These have been some of the worlds most sought after lures over the past couple of years. Their 'Blood red' and 'Possessed' range of colours feature moving liquid inside the lure which presents a unique sound and moving visual effect which predators can't resist!



# *Finesse Jacks*

*By  
Tom  
Glaser*

A recent conversation with a good mate of mine who resides on the New South Wales north coast turned to the subject of one of my favourite species, the mangrove jack. I mentioned that I had been using the usual heavy tackle and large minnow type lures I'd grown up on in north Queensland, to chase these enigmatic sport fish. Unfortunately my recent outings around the southern end of the sunshine state had seen a few missed strikes and half hearted follows but nothing landed.



Dan may have been feeling generous that day, though it's more likely the idea of spending a few days on my boat were his true motivation. Either way, he soon spilled the beans and told me of the surprisingly productive Jack fishing he had been experiencing the last few seasons. I was soon to learn of some alternative techniques to target jacks which not only didn't fit into the common stereotypes but in fact they completely turned them upside down and spat them out!

The typical scenario when it comes to Jack fishing is to throw a big lure or bait hard up against the nastiest structure imaginable and hold on for grim death! What had stirred my interest was the fact that Dan had been having great success fishing no more than 8lb leader and in the middle of the day!

As I backed the car down the bank and slid the tinny off the trailer, we were feeling confident. Dan assured me that if I kept plugging away in the hot and muggy conditions, with the techniques he'd been successful with, I would catch one of these elusive fish.

## The Fish

Mangrove Jack inhabit our coastal estuary and river systems throughout northern Australia venturing as far down as the mid coast of NSW and as far west as Shark Bay. Although large Jacks do sometimes live in rivers, it is generally the small to mid sized fish up to 60cm most of us will encounter in creeks and estuaries. The larger specimens usually inhabit inshore reefs where they migrate to spawn.

A renowned fighter, the mangrove jack has quite a following within the sport fishing community. Because of their athletic ability they can be a right pain to fish for with light tackle. However, in the right spots and with the right techniques you can have a ton of fun on the light string with these little brutes.

Even though they are renowned as a great table fish, a growing number of anglers are choosing to help preserve our fisheries by releasing the majority of their jacks. If you choose to keep one for the table you're well within your rights, however be aware that size and bag limits vary across states so check the regulations in your area.

## The Location

I had spent my formative years in the Northern regions of Queensland around Bowen and





Mackay catching jacks in large numbers, but I had never experienced anything like this trip. Attempting to throw away everything I knew about jack fishing, I frantically tried to apply the new theory into practice.

You may be as surprised as I was when Dan recommended I cast small, finesse presentations to what seemed like very featureless banks. Rather than the traditional snag or rock bar prone areas, a move to more open natural banks was the key. Still waters with a bottom of interspersed sand and rock, but with no major obtrusions as you would normally expect.

The main topographical significance was the inclusion of drop offs running parallel to the bank and dropping from depths of under a metre to a little over two. This gave the Jacks an edge to cruise along out of sight, in order to stalk the hapless baitfish covering in the shallows.

Fishing areas with minimal tidal flow such as the brackish backwaters of rivers and creeks will see your best chance at finding the right combination of these conditions.

Another good option to have up your sleeve is to fish any drains or areas of increased flow coming into the expanse of water you are fishing. In areas of minimal tidal flow, places where a large volume of water is moving will congregate bait. Casting to the edges of the moving water with

small, suspending jerkbaits can yield quite a mixed bag, not to mention some nice jacks.

Contrary to popular belief we found the peak bite period to be between ten and two pm when the sun was at its highest and the water temperature rising. The shallower sections of the bank heated up

presentations rather than the standard range of 'jack' lures produced some amazing results. We caught jacks from as little as 25cm up to the mid 40's and since that time a few 50cm plus models have fallen to the same technique. This 'finesse' style of jack fishing also lends itself well to lots of bycatch. I lost count of



earlier, attracting bait fish, which in turn was why the jacks were there.

During this time we consistently found the fish openly hunting along these shallow drop offs. Presenting more finesse

the amount of bream that jumped on our lures. Flathead and the nice surprise of a giant herring also graced the floor of the tinny that week.



## The Gear

Lures in the 50-75mm range diving to depths of 1m-2m were ideal. The body shape proved to play a big part in how much interest our lures had. Thinner, more slender lures definitely increased the bite. Lures such as Megabass X-55 and X-70, Megabass live-x Smolt, Zip-

surface walkers rather than poppers in the 70-90mm range were far and away the best choices. Lures like the popular Megabass Dog-x and Dog-x JR along with Lucky Craft Sammy 65's were seeing the most time tied to our lines.

As far as colour goes anything with a hint of gold or burnt orange is always a



baits Rigge 56 and 70f and Lucky Craft Flash minnows were some of the more popular choices in our arsenal.

Surface presentations were also a hit during the more aggressive feeding times,

good bet. More natural silvers and Ayu patterns are also good to have just in case a tough bite occurs and they are feeling a little timid.

A rod of around 7'-7'6" feet in length

and a line rating of 6-12lb or thereabouts will be all you will need. Anything heavier and casting the smaller lures begins to become a chore. Smith make a great little stick perfectly suited to this style of fishing know as the Dancing Bream. Daiwa also have a few rods within their newer releases that fit the bill. The TMZ-G 'Flatsmaster', Steez 'Thunderstorm' and the Interline TMZ-I 762MLFS all are ideal for finesse Jack fishing.

A good quality spinning reel in a 2500 size is recommended, with the Daiwa Steez being my preferred choice. The combination of lightweight construction with strong internals, plus a smooth, strong drag strong really provides the perfect tool. The slightly quicker line pick up over that of a 2000 size reel was also important to combat the quick changes in direction the Jacks sometimes delivered.

Braided line is a must, somewhere in the vicinity of 8-12lb will see you through the majority of situations as anything heavier will affect your casting distance with the smaller offerings. A woven braid is preferred over a fused gelspun line for the added casting distance it provides. A good quality fluorocarbon leader mate-

rial of around 8-10lb will cope with the wear and tear a Jack will dish out when targeted in this way. We always used 10lb or less and the leader was never so badly damaged that we saw the need to upgrade.

Terminals are a bit of a conundrum, Jacks have a habit of destroying hooks and the light wire trebles that come standard on smaller lures do sometimes straighten. Fishing a stronger treble is an option, though due to the light nature of the gear being used missed hook ups will be inevitable. It's best to stick to a finer gauge hook in around size 8-10 depending on lure size and accept that a few bent trebles are part of the equation. We found the Owner ST36-BC in size 8 and the Decoy YS-26 in size 10 to be the pick of the trebles. Retro fitting single hooks such as the Decoy Pluggin or Troutin singles to your lures may withstand the abuse a little better, however we are yet to experiment with this option so the jury is still out.

## The Technique


For the areas we were fishing, positioning the boat well away from the drop



off and executing long casts to the edge was the common theme. Our lures usually landed in around 15cm of water then were worked through the shallower sun warmed water with a fairly brisk retrieve. Not unlike some flathead methods, when the lure transitioned from the sun warmed shallow banks into the drop off was when we picked up the majority of our Jacks.

If a Jack is holding in the area and is actively feeding it will have no qualms about charging down a lure. It is more efficient to cover multiple similar spots to try and find active fish than to plug away in one spot attempting to stimulate a reaction bite.

A slower retrieve although effective saw our lures getting eaten by bream and flathead more often. Usually this would be a welcome result, but when targeting jacks the

A man wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and a dark cap is smiling while holding a large, silver fish with a prominent dorsal fin. The fish is held horizontally, and a fishing lure is visible in its mouth. The background shows a boat on water with trees and a building in the distance.

more time your lure is in the mouth of another fish that's time not spent in the water and you could miss your window of opportunity.

For the topwater presentations, again a moderate to medium-fast walk-the-dog tended to draw the most strikes. Pausing the lure only seemed to deter the fish from hitting. Fishing the topwaters was a matter of finding a patch

of active fish with sub surface lures then switching over to try and witness an explosive surface strike.

It is a commonly held belief that with jacks the harder you pull against them the harder they pull back. When struck with a sudden and considerable force something in their instinct triggers them to run hard into the nearest cover often ending in shredded leaders. The trick to landing them on light gear is upon hook-up don't apply too much pressure, they will either break your line or you will encourage the Jack to run into a snag. Constant, smooth and even pressure can be used to guide fish out into open areas. The use of an electric motor can help in this situation to lead a fish out before the fighting of the fish commences. Most of the time, the less pressure you put on the fish, the less the fish will try and bust you off. This is well proven by the amount of jacks caught on light line as bycatch of bream fishing. Occasionally there will be times when these rules will need to be broken, but in the situations we encountered and the locations we were fishing there was never the need to deviate from this. If a suspected jack does hook up and charge

a snag, lowering your rod, angling it to the side and applying even pressure can often swing them around. If this fails, flipping your bail arm (providing a good hookset was achieved) will usually confuse the fish and give you a chance to bring it back under control. Some claim that fighting jacks on light gear doesn't allow you to feel the true power of the fish and this may be the case, however the fact remains that by going lighter you'll hook more fish. While bust offs are usually synonymous with jack fishing, our experiences show you'll land a lot more than you'll lose when fishing the above techniques and locations.

I had some great times on this trip, which completely contradicted my childhood memories of jack fishing. I have added to them with my experiences of catching these brutes on much lighter gear and I'm looking forward to doing it all again soon.

We encourage you to go out and try these ideas to see whether you can surprise yourself with the potential for jacks in their southern haunts. Let us know how you get on and be sure to send us pics of your success.



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