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Fishing Port Douglas News

with Heff



Welcome to the first edition of 2024, which celebrates 25yrs of this now small publication but still part of what we do at Fishing Port Douglas informing you of what is happening from the ground.

There's no question the Far North was put through the washing machine with Cyclone Jasper in mid December and the record breaking rain that followed. Six weeks on and the effects are still very evident across the shire. The stories that you still hear are quite horrific and there is definite scarring that needs to be healed.

Some of that healing that can't be replaced was the huge financial impact of literally every business in the area over the Christmas and New Year period. That traditional trade period typically sees the region keep on its feet till Easter. With Covid and now this, it is the biggest test I've seen in 28yrs of living in FNQ. The ongoing water crisis took things to a new level and the local council have so much to answer for, years of neglect and denial.

There was some minimal relief when the Captain Cook Highway reopened by the 20th January but the school holiday period was well and truly dusted. The only access to say Port Douglas was a 2.5hr drive from Cairns across the range and back down. In saying this our boats did manage a trickle of charters and for those that made the trek, we were extremely grateful. We didn't disappoint either in the fishing department and there were some of the best catches recorded in a couple of months. River, reef and game fishing all delivered at some point as you'll read further on.

The 2024 dates for the Port Douglas Marlin Challenge have been released. November 20th-23rd are the important 4 days you need to put on your calendar. Following a brilliant and record breaking catch rate in 2023 we are expecting a lot of interest this year. It also is fantastic to see the formerly world famous Lizard Island tournament in mid October back in the ring after several years in the wilderness. This tournament has traditionally attracted a lot vessels and we anticipate a lot of these boats will be still in the area a month later for our hot bite on our local grounds.

Moving forward things will be quiet for us for a couple of months but there are some fantastic deals to be had with air flights and accommodation. At Fishing Port Douglas we are glad to announce the following:

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Fishing On the Daintree

with Jamie Beitzel



Welcome to my 2024 reports which have had their challenges since the last one. As most would be aware the area went through hell and back in mid December 2023 with Cyclone Jasper creating havoc. It wasn't so much the cyclone itself but the aftermath of rain that fell and to this day we are still reeling the effects. Something ridiculous like 3400mm fell on the region in a week or so. Yes that's right, 3400mm which is a record by a country mile and I've never seen anything like it in all my life being born and bred on the Daintree. Someone was saying the other day it smashed the longest recorded rainfall by over 2m. The water level overflow from the river was lapping into the foothills on the south side of the river some 4km away. Anyway it has all drained away but the weather event has changed the landscape of the river in a massive way. All the fisherman's huts that lined the river in certain sections have been washed away and the river itself has changed dramatically. Some of my old spots have remained remarkably, yet most have been washed away. In saying this it has created some new structure in the way of logs and trees which have settled. It will take some time to somewhat rediscover the river and what we'll find over the coming months.

Naturally we lost a lot of business over the Christmas and New

Year period which is impossible to make up coming into the traditional quiet season. However I did muster up a few charters and it was mostly in challenging conditions with river quality at its hardest. Dirty water, lack of live bait and still a bit of rain in area have kept things quite raw.

I've had to revert to old fashioned techniques using quality dead baits but to my surprise this has worked like a treat. I guess the fish had to eat at some point after an extended turbulent period. I caught plenty of quality grunter across the flats and secured some really handy fingermark amongst the timber areas of the river. I caught some good barra on lures which had to be released in the closed season but they will be on the menu from February 1st. I personally think it is going to be very productive for barra over the next few months.

We just need time for everything to settle and the Daintree River will fire post wet season. Unfortunately north of the river up through Cow Bay to Cape Tribulation will be their toughest year ahead with ongoing infrastructure issues expected to be long lasting. But don't be put off by media reports as we are well and truly open for business on the Daintree River and the fishing will let rip any moment now. Hope you can join us as you wont be disappointed with the fishing opportunities.



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Akula Sportfishing



with Jason Knack

Well just like that it's 2024 and I hope everyone had a great Christmas and New Year. The lead up to cyclone Jasper, the cyclone itself, and the rainfall afterwards certainly put the death knell on visiting tourists to Port Douglas. The tourists cleared out like they had cheated us in poker! The media in my opinion have so much to answer for, particularly from the southern counterparts and we all know who the culprits are. Sure we had some weather and council issues but the ramifications will be hard felt for many including businesses and local families. Anyway, moving forward let's get one thing very clear; Port Douglas is open for business, and the roads are all open! The recent quiet period did provide one positive, it gave me the opportunity to venture out purely looking for new ground, and oh boy did we find some great country ranging from new wonky holes to isolated patches of gravel, and we boated some great fish! Just check out our social media platforms to see for yourself.

On the occasions we have had outer reef charters the fishing has been very good, especially for large Coral Trout, quality Nannygai and Red Emperor. There's been as well Gold Band Snapper along with the regular catches and you'll never eat a better quality fish in my opinion, not common but a cracking piece of the puzzle up in FNQ. It is well worth saying barring our hiccup, the weather has been awesome since more often than not!

A tip for the month is to always fish a variety of rigs to see if one works better than the other at that particular time. Simple examples of what I use are a running sinker rig, a paternoster and a hybrid jig (essentially like fishing a running sinker rig).

Great Barrier Reef Port Douglas



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When fishing with artificials mix it up with jigs and vibes (if the current allows). Hopefully a mixed arsenal gives you the edge which can be the difference between a great trip and an average one.

Explore different ground and be on the initiative, keep moving around at this time of year because there's some pretty impressive fishing to be had. Don't be a lazy fisherman and sit in the one spot hoping for a bite is what I'm eluding to.



Saltaire Charters



with Craig Newbold

Hi to all for 2024, between you, me and lamp post down the road I'm glad to see the back end of 2023. It ended up disastrously with Cyclone Jasper turning the area upside down on its head. The ensuing rainfall post cyclone was beyond belief. Not only did the business lose all its holiday trade but the personal cost to close friends losing their homes was the most tragic. What do you do? You've got no choice but to wipe off the dust and keep going. It will leave a huge scar on the area but the good news is most of us are back on our feet and operating no problem. Besides the inconvenience of relocating boats up the creek for the cyclone, our vessels escaped without incident or too much drama.

By early January we were slowly ticking over with mothership commitments accommodating with a fishing boat, standard day charters and air rescue exercises. It took some time for the fishing to come back on line with the amount of fresh, green water at sea but it hit back quite well.

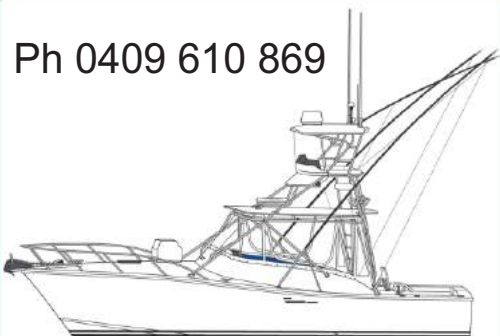
Probably the most interesting thing we learnt was the

amount of bait that had been pushed out towards the continental shelf but still inside the reef. The pelagic fishing was red hot for the likes of spanish mackerel, mack tuna and more interestingly yellowfin tuna. Now typically you'd expect to see yellowfin outside of the reef on the shelf, but obviously they realised something was happening inside and they went their in droves. In the area which we refer to as 'the paddocks', the surface activity was alive with tunas and bird life. On a couple of charters we did it wasn't too hard to tap into this activity. Spanish mackerel to 10kg and yellowfin tuna to 8kg were quite abundant. It didn't really matter what lures you were trolling as they were in a super frenzy mood. For those on board angling it was a ball for them.

Bottom fishing efforts also produced some nice large mouth nannygai on the days it was calm enough but it was hard to ignore the light game action for excellent value. It was our go to formula to get results. Looking ahead we expect things to go quiet tourist wise but there are some great deals out there for a great valued holiday.



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