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MAR 22



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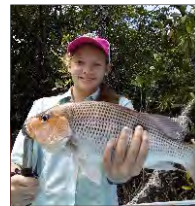
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Front Cover:
Jake Collete caught this magnificent feed of Mud Crabs sourced locally from the Cairns Inlet. Sunday lunch FNQ style ...



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VMR 410 Channel 16, 72, 81

Changes are on their way

By Heff



Recently I attended the QLD Fisheries Advisory Board meeting for the Reef Line Fishing Group which was held over two days in Cairns. In total there were 16 attendees from different sectors including government reps, GBRMPA, commercial fishing, recreational fishing, indigenous fishing and I was representing the charter industry.

Species up for discussion were coral trout, red emperor, plus saddletail and crimson snapper (large and small mouth nannygai). There was a lot of information to absorb and to put it short there will be some legislation changes on the horizon.

We'll start with the coral trout and according to the data compiled since 2019 it was deemed that their fish stocks across the entirety of the Great Barrier Reef were at a level of 59% bio-mass. 100% bio-mass is basically virgin fishing. Government has set the benchmark that 60% bio-mass is the magic number to achieve and maintain a sustainable fishery. So essentially these stocks are quite healthy, even though the commercial sector copped a further 50 tonne reduction in their quota for the coming year. This did not sit well with the commercial members in the meeting and is compounded by the fact that their biggest market in Asia in currently non-existent due to Covid. Their message was quite clear that they are really struggling as an industry at the moment.

For the recreational and charter sector there are no changes for the coming year as the data indicated they were well within its annual allocated quota. There was a lot of debate in the meeting from certain members as to how accurate the recreational fisho data actually is. This was questioned particularly from the commercial representatives and they made some very valid points. They stated that there is a lot more traffic on the water in recent years and with better technology and equipment, the recreational group have to be making a bigger impact on the stocks. Furthermore it is without penalty when it comes to coral trout. The

government reps explained that their data collecting methods are always improving in regards to this sector of the fishery. There was no debate about the charter industry as the data collected is extremely accurate with the regulations in place.

Onto the other 3 species and it had been quite some time since the last stock assessments. The bio-mass numbers were revealed and there will be some changes inevitably for both commercial and recreational sectors:

Red Emperor 58%

Crimson Snapper (small mouth) 44%

Saddletail Snapper (large mouth) 26%

No decisions have been made but it was open for discussion how to improve these figures quickly especially in regards to the nannygai species. The red emperor scenario they seem to be happy with for the moment. Here are some of the suggestions thrown around the table in regards relation to:

- reduce commercial quota
 - reduce bag limits considerably for recreational fisho's
 - increase size limits across the board
 - separate the current combined species bag limit in place. The Saddletail and Crimson should have it's own set of rules
 - For government to categorise these 3 species as Target Species and not as part the Other Species grouping. Basically this will classify them as a priority group, exactly the same as coral trout and receive the same scrutiny
 - Introduce a closed season for the above species
 - Need to establish more science on the Nannygai maturity age & size of breeding
- Continued Next Page**



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As essential as a Bung in Your Boat

As a follow up from the meeting I sat down with the skippers of the charter boats I manage and this was their feedback or suggestions which have been forwarded onto Fisheries:

- separate the combined nannygai species into their own individual category
- Large Mouth Nannygai Bag Limit 3, Minimum Size 50cm
- Small Mouth Nannygai Bag Limit 4, Minimum Size 45cm
- Red Emperor Bag Limit 2, Minimum Size 55cm
- All three species should be categorised as Target Species
- The concept of a closed season on these species we don't believe will work. It would definitely turn the pressure back on the coral trout stocks as the only viable target species worth pursuing during a closed period. (Why rob Peter to pay Paul)
- Also we often catch a mixture of coral trout, nannygai and red emperor all on the same ground at the one time. It's literally impossible to target one specific species and not come across the other in most cases.
- More education is required in regards to releasing these species in good condition. They do release quite well when returned quickly back into the water. They simply don't like being out of the drink for too long.
- We have found that the fishing has remained very consistent in our region over many years. Stocks seem to be quite healthy, but also we are very accommodating to reducing the amount of fish people are allowed to take home. Recreational Bag Limits in general are currently way to generous across the board in our opinion.

We'll keep you posted to see what transpires as further information comes to hand in regards to the above.
 Now here's another species under the microscope and that's the spanish mackerel




MACKEREL CANCELLED

The 2016 assessment of Spanish Mackerel stocks was at a healthy 40% of pre-fished biomass. Yet now the government claims that in 2019/20 the stock had plummeted to 17% of Mackerel left.

What changed? Small something fishy?
 Come along and find out what's really going on from scientists, Dr Peter Ricci & Geoff McPherson

Public meeting in Cairns
 Thursday 24th March 6-8pm
 Calvary Church Facility
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for both the commercial and recreational sectors. I'm not part of the advisory team for this particularly species but the strong rumour is the government are on the verge of making some massive wholesale changes including the possibility of shutting it down completely.

The reason for this is that the latest stock assessments claim that the from the last report of 40% bio-mass it has plummeted down to 17%. Now this was briefly brought up in the recent meeting I was at and from my understanding the modelling the government used from the last stock assessment in regards to mackerel has been changed to another for the latest figures. If this is the case this is a major, major blunder of mis-mangement on behalf of the government. To be honest the elephant in the room is the big commercial operations that are allowed still to net on prime mackerel breeding locations along the entire coast and oceanic highways that the mackerel follow in their migratory patterns. Single line commercial operators and the recreational sector have a minimal impact.


If this closure was to follow through the ramifications would be catastrophic. Off the top of my head it would affect light tackle charter boats, the tackle industry itself, service stations, bait suppliers and the list would go on and on and on.

As you can read by the flyer pictured there's been a major meeting held recently by the public in Cairns which I'll follow up on and report in the next edition. We'll endeavour to keep you posted on all you have read thus far. ■



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The Dragon's Den

By Steve Adamson

Last edition we finished off by saying that we were installing our new engine. This didn't quite eventuate as we were awaiting on a new component to the gear box which is integral to the new engine. Bugger me sideways, this part took 3 weeks to get here due to freight issues. So in saying all this it has been an 8 week exercise at a huge cost and also loss of charter work. I'm not going to bang on about it but as we speak the new engine is being dropped in by crane. Once aligned it will a few day process to put back together followed by a couple of extensive sea trials. It has been a harrowing process which you wouldn't wish on any operator. By next week we'll be up and running and making up for lost time and income.

So in short I'm unable to provide any fishing reports this month much to my disappointment. However we have had some interesting developments which is exciting for the business and our potential to catch more fish. We have just received a grant to trial a couple of shark deterrent devices which have been developed to deter sharks around the boat at various depths and with a couple of different frequencies. It is deemed it won't affect the fishing activity. The ultimate goal is to prevent losing fish stocks to sharks. As even the recreational fisherman would adhere to, some days you lose a high percentage of fish hooked up to sharks. In our case 30-40% on the bad days which have been more frequent in recent years. Even the average fisho could say they may get their one coral trout to the boat and lose potentially half a dozen to sharks. This is not protecting fish stocks in any form or matter. As a charter we may have to shift several miles to escape the carnage of shark activity when it's heightened. I sense the average boatie would hang tough and stay in the general area prepared to chance their luck.

Anyway we can't wait to get our hands on these devices to see if they actually work. We have a contract in place with the government to formally supply data from this point on. In saying this we have already committed and are well underway in the supply of shark DNA samples to research from bitten fish we actually retrieve to the boat. These swab samples and photos are taken to the Sunshine Coast University for a complete analytic process. This has been well underway in the southern parts of Queensland with other operators but we are the first operator to do this in FNQ on the Great Barrier Reef. We basically are the pioneers of putting time and effort into this identified problem and being able to understand why in our region.

The first batch of DNA swabs sent off for analysis blew us away. We always assumed it was the dusky whaler shark as the main culprit as you often have them hovering around the boat even up to 15ft. We also assumed Bull Sharks and Black Tip Reef Sharks to be further common culprits. Well here's one for the books which took our hats off. 93% of DNA

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samples we supplied, categorically indicated the Pig Eye Shark. Crikey ! We hadn't even heard of them before. Science information tells us they inhabit the Indo-Pacific region, not too much different in first appearance to a Bull Shark in the water, prefer the lower half of the water column and go like the clappers when first hooked. Makes a lot of sense because we can't get them close to the boat once hooked.

The interesting point moving forward with this first round of data collected from the warmer months is, will it correlate into the winter months? We are now completely intrigued. Is another species likely to take over or is it the new Pig Eye Shark been the big culprit all along. Our shark deterrent device program is scheduled to kick off late April and we'll keep you informed. ■



Pig Eye Shark

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Breathing in the Saltaire

By Jake Colette



For us the March period was always going to be a bit on the lighter side in regards to charters but in saying this we completed more days than recent years, which is a positive sign.

We achieved around 10 days of daily charters which predominantly involved a combination of fishing methods and snorkeling on the reef. Species we caught included coral trout and large mouth nannygai in some really hot and calm conditions. The fishing wasn't overly easy with sea surface temperatures at an all time high. Naturally we had to fish as deep as possible for our bottom species and basically the surface fishing was non-existent under the duress of the heat. The snorkeling however was supreme and a refreshing part of many daily trips.

We were fortunate this month to accommodate a couple of overnight trips, 3 & 4 days respectively. With some really accomplished return anglers, one trip was highly successful fishing further north with an abundance of fish caught from nannygai, red emperor, coral trout, gold

band snapper and everything in between. Tides were ideal and the weather were of great assistance, barring one night which saw an unexpected storm come off the mainland and made it a challenging nightfall. Other than this it was as good as it gets when fishing on the outer reef.

Our other extended trip was with an angler which brought along an electric reel due to physical constraints. This was a bit of a learning curve for us having not had the need to utilise such equipment before. We fished the main reef as well as off the shelf in a few hundred metres of water. Overall the fishing was a lot tougher but we did manage to find some stonker nannygai and other bits and pieces including an oversized green jobfish. It was again a very hot and calm period prior to the decent rainfall which came a few days following this particular charter.

We have a late run of charters at the back end of March to complete involving Gt popper fishing and jigging for species in deeper water. Then moving into April it goes to another gear and if the weather can hold I suspect we'll record our best April trade to date. Down the track future bookings are probably also at their best point at the current time and will only improve week by week.

The coming weeks should be quite productive with the change of seasons at hand. Water temperatures have dropped somewhat but need to go further to reignite the pelagic activity in particular. It will be an absolute pleasure to be working in far more comfortable mercury levels having under gone the hottest summer many can remember. Fingers crossed any potential cyclones stay well away from the Coral Sea. ■



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On the Daintree Charters

By Jamie Beitzel - The Local Huckleberry Finn



The best thing that happened for us fishing on the Daintree River this last month was that we got a good drop of rain over several days. It turned the river orange but it was absolutely necessary to stir up the system. Prior to this the river and coastal trips I completed were starting to get really hard as everything was that god damn hot and still. Bait was as rare as hen's teeth and the fish were getting harder and harder to entice. Sure I caught some nice fingermark and mangrove jack in the river and the odd really good nannygai along the coast, but it was a lot of angst on my behalf waiting for the fish to bite. Along the coast I was also able to conjure up some good pelagic fish on the surface including big queenfish and spanish mackerel on the poppers. This again was a bit thin overall in the hot and calm conditions and I was pleased to be able to provide this action. In saying all this I was able to achieve good results for the conditions and received great customer satisfaction.

So with some good rains finally falling from the sky I still pushed through with charters. I must admit the rain was a bit chilly at times for me personally as I'd been sweating like a trooper for months. I have mentioned this previously but I have worked out a good plan when the river is running dirty. This came to fruition again catching high quality javelin fish to 60cm, 3-4kg golden trevally and hard fighting shovel nose ray which the tourists enjoy. Good old fashioned heavy sinkers, with

60cm of leader allowing a combination of really fresh squid and pilchard allowed to drift off the floor in the current works a treat. I'm really pleased with this development when basically everyone else will stay off the water.

Once the rains eased, the river cleared up and the big tides subsided, the river took on a new lease of life. I was continually seeing a lot of activity and the trips were done in the blink of an eye or so it seemed. A heap of mid sized giant trevally arrived in the system sensing a newly formed supply of bait. Sometimes I had to drive away from them to explore different sections of the river. It was great to see them return and on light gear they go really well. I continued on with a good run of javelin fish, nailed some over impressive fingermark to 65cm which is a really good one for the river and also plucked several barra. They all obviously enjoyed the change in the local habitat.

The seasons have finally changed and in my opinion the fishing for us is only going to get better. It is going to be a joy to be on the water with more temperate conditions. I'm expecting some more rain in the next month or so but it will only enhance what we have to offer. I'm quite upbeat with what we'll be able to achieve in coming weeks.

Forward bookings are now extremely competitive so I'm suggesting to secure a trip sooner rather than later if you want to come and fish one of the most pristine systems in the region on the doorstep of the Daintree Rainforest. ■



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Reel Cooking with Heff

Nannygai Fish Skewers



This one is perfect for a quick BBQ grill cook up, perfect for dinner or a weekend brunch with a cold beer or glass of white wine. The fish needs to be of a firm flesh. The vegetable component on the skewer is completely up to personal preference. The wash up afterwards is as simple as it comes.

Ingredients

- 1kg of Large Mouth Nannygai fillets, cut into 3cm cubes
- 12 Bamboo Skewers pre-soaked in water for 30 minutes or use metal skewers
- 1 red capsicum cut into 2 x 2cm squares
- 1 green capsicum cut into 2 x 2cm squares
- 1 yellow capsicum cut into 2 x 2cm squares
- 1 red or white onion cut into 2 x 2cm squares
- Button Mushrooms whole
- Olive Oil for brushing over the skewer ingredients
- Salt and Pepper
- Self made or purchased tartare sauce for a dip. (Suggestion only)



Method

- Heat the grill at a medium heat.
- Thread all the ingredients alternatively onto the skewer till full.
- Season with salt and pepper.
- Lightly brush olive over the package.
- Turn once on each section of the cubed fish till golden brown.
- Serve on a platter with an accompany of your preferred dipping sauce.



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