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Fishing Port Douglas News

with Heff



Latest Reef Health Update

Just this week, the Reef Authority has continued working with the crown-of-thorns starfish control program, tourism operators, the Australian Institute of Marine Science and researchers to conduct in-water surveys to better understand of current conditions in the Marine Park.

Aerial surveys have also resumed this week in the southern Great Barrier Reef, covering the Swains and offshore reefs up to the Whitsundays. These surveys covered 230 reefs, and observed varying levels of coral bleaching on all reefs surveyed.

Aerial surveys to collect further data from the far-north will continue over coming weeks.

The patterns of coral bleaching observed from the aerial surveys are consistent with the heat stress that built up over the summer months in the southern Great Barrier Reef.

Temperature

Recent changes in weather patterns means the build up of heat stress has peaked and is now starting to plateau across the Marine Park.

Heavy rainfall, elevated wind and wave actions associated with weather systems offshore Mackay and northern Australia this past week have had a cooling effect on sea surface temperatures in the Northern and Southern regions, although sea surface temperatures remain above average across the Marine Park.

International climate models suggest the El Niño weather event is decaying, with sea surface temperatures in the central Pacific predicted to return to more neutral levels in May.

Rainfall

In the Far North, the Wet Tropics recorded 400 mm of rainfall, and there has been up to 300 mm in the Cape York Catchment.

There are low salinity levels between Cardwell and Cape Melville, and north of Lockhart River resulting from above average streamflow in these catchments that drain into the Marine Park.

Overall Reef health

A total of 193 in-water surveys were conducted in the Marine Park between 13 March–20 March 2024.

Mostly minor to moderate impacts were recorded across surveyed reefs in the past week, noting that the coral bleaching event is still unfolding and its full effects won't be evident until it ends.

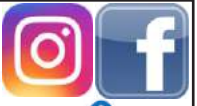
Crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks were found at some reefs in the offshore Southern Region (Swain Reefs), and there were isolated outbreaks on some reefs offshore Townsville and the Whitsundays in the Central Region. Outbreaks of these coral-eating starfish continue to build up in the Northern Region with increasing densities near Lizard Island and offshore Port Douglas.

School Holiday Trade

On the local scene we have seen a late burst of bookings for a variety of Fishing Charters for the up and coming school holidays. Client forward bookings are very essential from this point on with April looking to be reasonably busy.

It appears people are very budget conscious at the moment which in the current economic climate is not surprising. We offer a range of great valued options at Fishing Port Douglas so there's always something to suit the budget. The latest forecast looks quite favourable in the next week or so and the fishing is expected to shift to a new level.





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Fishing On the Daintree

with Jamie Beitzel



Hi to everyone from the Daintree River. Well the month of March can be split into two separate halves and I will explain further.

The first couple of weeks went gang busters as we had very settled conditions and the overnight rains weren't overbearing on the system. It was at times borderline but it didn't push the threshold and the fishing was excellent.

When things work in your favour you make hay whilst the sun is shining. I did do a couple of coastal trips when the seas allowed and I'm pleased to say we caught some mackerel and a few hefty sized large mouth nannygai. There continues to be a really healthy supply of bait along the coast and this can turn it into a really vibrant environment. My prediction is that the month of April will be extremely prosperous along the coastline of the Daintree.

Within the river itself during this period it was down to business targeting barra and fingermark. There's only a certain window when both top notch species are fair game and in an enthusiastic mood. Many of the barra I caught were above average for this river and they were consistently between the 72-80cm range. Live baits are my preference as I can place these right into the strike zone which is not an easy task. Clients are instructed to hold the rod and lock and load when they first hit using the rod to pull them immediately out of some tricky areas.



It those first few turns of the reel that are critical and once out in the open they are a lot easier to deal with. You lose the odd one when they jump but at the moment they are hooking themselves nicely.

The same can be said about the fingermark. Live bait again and hang on tight when they hit. They like a bit deeper water but holding close to some serious structure. Fish in general at the moment are feeding aggressively and the bites are pretty much instant, so angler reaction time is critical.

Things were going along nicely then we saw a bit of monsoonal activity from the cyclone which formed in the gulf. There was nothing destructive about it but for quite a few days it dumped a consistent 100mm of rain per day in the area. Gradually this turned the river a bit orange and got close to making it unfishable. I did run a few charters and caught enough to keep everyone happy but it was a challenging week or so. I'll only fish if I can catch fish and conditions are safe, first and foremost.

Leading into Easter we have a lot of bookings. The river is cleaning up beautifully and it will be a lot of fun to fish. I'm tipping the next few weeks will be one of the hot bites for the year.



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Akula Sportfishing



with Jason Knack

The month of March provided a mix of weather including wind, rain and absolute glamour days, and we certainly maximized our opportunities with those great days of weather hitting the reef with our clients. I would like to clarify one thing to all, and that is that north Queensland is open for business! Everything is as usual up here so please disregard mainstream media who wants us all to believe the world is ending, and phone or email a local operator to obtain the correct and real state of the region.

Our far north Queensland traditional wet season is ticking along nicely and flushing the creeks and rivers out well pushing plenty of bait schools out wider. Here is another false impression so many have of our region this time of year; it does not rain all day, every day! Most of our days are beautiful with rain occurring in the evenings, and it is a great experience to treat yourself to. Surface water temperature is still a balmy 30/31 degrees celcius. The bottom fishing has been consistent with good quality Coral Trout, Nannygai, Spangled Emperor and Red Emperor coming onboard. Wonky holes are firing so luckily I have plenty to choose from, and they have been producing some



Great Barrier Reef Port Douglas



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'Dino' model Large Mouth Nannygai. There are also plenty of Spanish Mackerel around, if you know where the bait schools are holding and always a great option if you want to go light tackle sportfishing. Remember bag limits for Spanish are one per person, and a maximum of two to a boat.

Tip for the month is to know and understand which way the current will be travelling depending on what tide you are fishing. Admiralty charts will show it ("Feathers = Flood", if you know you know this narrative), or download digital maps onto your phone/tablet that have these features.

Fishing pressure points is critical for success on top water, and still very important if you fish reef edges. Example: if you fish a reef edge on the northern side with current pushing south to north, you will limit your success as opposed to if you are fishing the pressure side. Weather conditions (comfort) play a big part in this too and I do get that often. Unfortunately sometimes we cannot have our cake and eat it too!

Good luck in April and I hope you all get plenty of engine hours on the water.

Saltaire Charters



with Craig Newbold

Okay, the month of March saw us in a variety of roles with our vessels. Time just flies and never seems to stop.

After many previous delays due to weather conditions we finally full filled the JCU University trip to the Turtle Island group west of Lizard Island aboard the Escapade Mothership over 12 days. It was our task to accommodate 4 academics to assess the reef systems around this specific island along with an inflatable tender, an extensive dive set up and naturally our knowledge of the area. It is hard to gauge what their final report findings will entail but according to our crew their was general talk about the surrounding reefs and that they were generally quite healthy, a bit of coral bleaching in some parts and some damage from the big cyclone which passed over the region several years ago. There's no time frame on the final report but we are keen to see the narrative in which they present it.

Closer back home in Port Douglas on Saltaire, we serviced a few trips with the Emergency Air Services training sessions including an Australian Maritime Safety Authority audit on one trip. According to our colleague's in the sky on this mission, the audit passed with flying colours. The Cairns based aircraft we work in tandem with can be flown

in a 5000km diameter for emergency situations whether it be on the land or water. There's only a few set ups like this in the country which include Cairns, Adelaide and Perth. We are extremely proud to be part of this service.

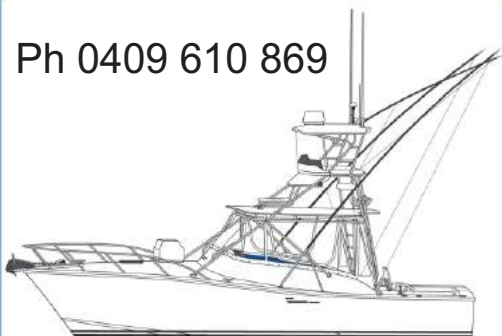
Alright, into some fishing for you guys. Actual charter wise for us it was quieter but not without incident. With the amount of rain over a few months it has turned the reef into a feeding pot for the pelagic species on the outer reef. There is a lot of bait out there but you need to travel the required miles to access this. Cleaner water and good currents are necessary to attain success. The Spanish mackerel in pockets were as thick as you can imagine.

5-10kg varieties were as hungry as a pack of wolves. With current regulations by the government we had to drive away from the bite which makes it tough to explain to our clients which on more than one occasion came across from overseas to visit us just for our fishing. It's not a good look but we have the means to keep the charter active by utilising different methods to entice further action with tuna activity.

Knowing what we know, April will be red hot fishing. We also have a 7.5m ready to go in the coming month for all sportfishing aspects so be sure to book your ticket and call. We're excited from our end



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