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Contact Us if you'd like to
Contribute - Most Welcome

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Jamie Beitzel's
On the Daintree
with a
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Saltwater
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Advisory Board Role QLD

By Heff



During April I was accepted onto the Advisory Group for QLD Fisheries in relation to the Reef Line Fishery. Recently the workshop met in Cairns over two days at the Northern Fisheries Department. The workshop comprised of 9 delegates from QLD Fisheries, 3 operators from the Live Coral Trout industry, 1 operator from the Commercial Reef industry, a researcher from James Cook University, a Live Coral Trout Exporter, a Recreational Fishing representative and myself carrying the role of representing all Recreational Charter Operators fishing on the Great Barrier Reef.

In 2017 the QLD Fisheries set in place a Harvest Strategy which they endeavor to follow till 2027. It is a commitment the government has set in concrete. The complex strategy is to ensure we obtain a sustainable fishery for the future. The main species set for this workshop were the Coral Trout and Red Throat Emperor. The majority of the time was spent on the Coral Trout as data indicated there was no change required for the Red Throat Emperor which were well above sustainable levels (72%) for both the commercial and recreational sectors.

The overall Harvest Strategy considers 60% of the Bio Mass to be the minimum figure for a sustainable fishery. Bio Mass is basically a term to describe the absolute potential of fish stocks with 100% being the peak and would require literally no fishing



pressure from any sector. Basically untouched waters so to speak or virgin waters as the fisheries call it.

The overall Harvest Strategy dedicates 80% of all Trout catches to the commercial sector and 20% to the recreational sector including charters. With world class modeling using the most recent data collected the recreational sector came under the allocated Total Overall Catch thus requiring no amendments to the governing rules in place. Interestingly the Charter Section was well under its allocation. The overall recreational sector is allocated 268 tonnes per year. The most recent recreational and charter harvest estimate for coral trout is 228 tonnes, well below the 268 tonne decision rule trigger, meaning no management action is required.

The commercial sector however required an adjustment with data suggesting a 59% Bio Mass reading on most recent figures. In 2020 - 2021 they were allocated 1183 tonnes of Trout and the proposed reduction to get their figures back up to above the 60% target was to reduce their catch by 305 tonnes per annum. After much robust discussion it was recommended to reduce their allocation by 200 tonnes. Stakeholders and the Fisheries seem to be agreeable on this outcome to reach the required 60% Bio Mass set in the Harvest Strategy.

As mentioned the Fisheries have for a little while now been using the most advanced modelling strategies in the world to determine how our QLD waters are managed. The same modelling is applied to the other 13 sectors of the fishery which include the likes of scalloping, mud crabbing and prawning to name a few. In a nutshell we are recognised as the best managed fishery in the world. A lot of time and money is invested into making sure we have a really sustainable fishery. ▶

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Advisory Board Cont ...

Now a lot of intense discussion was dedicated to the Coral Trout allocation moving forward but there were a lot of other interesting topics discussed over the two days which I'll elaborate on.

According to the JCU representative the coral bleaching on the reef itself had settled down but there was significant effects in the Coral Sea offshore on various isolated reefs which rise up from the depths. He indicated global warming is a result of this and should be a concern.

In recent times all Commercial Fishing vessels have been forced to install VMR devices which basically signal a GPR track whenever they go to sea. It is monitored by AMSA, GBRMPA and the Fisheries. The concept is to follow movements to eliminate illegal fishing in Green Zones and to collect valuable data. It is kept confidential so no fishing spots are passed on. Technically the boats including dories are not allowed to go to sea without this device working. However there's been multiple issues with the VMR failing to work and also passing through Green Zones whilst travelling or attempting to find safe anchorage. It is an ongoing issue.

The commercial representation in the workshop did question the recreational data not believing the results presented. The Fisheries did counter this conception saying their data collection is the best it's ever been and will continue to improve.

The commercial Trout sector also pleaded with the government to publicly get behind their overall campaign as they are the only commercial fishery in the world to fish with one line, one hook and sinker. It is truly unique and sustainable. Also a very volatile export market with Asia and China is compounding the situation and they are very concerned for its viability moving forward. Overheads are through the roof and market prices for their product is stagnant with no signs of improving.

An interesting observation came from one of the commercial boys and that was that certain reefs further north absolutely devastated by a cyclone a few years ago have now fully recovered and supplying a bounty of quality fish. The resilience of mother nature to bounce back cannot be

underestimated he stated.

The Chief Officer for the Cairns Fishery Region reported on compliance within the overall sector for the last 12 months. With the 100's and 100's of inspections carried out both commercially and recreationally it was found there was 94% of compliance. The non-compliance issues were mostly minor with half a dozen cases requiring further attention from the law. For the recreational sector it was offences for mainly first time boaties not knowing where they were allowed to fish and safety equipment. Overall he was pleased with the level of compliance considering the high number of people on the water nowadays.

At the end of the workshop we had a presentation from a Fisheries Researcher whereby they are analysing the age of a fish by dissecting the inner ear lobe. Using highly powered microscopes they can count the rings developed every year they live, much like a the rings on a tree. These ear parts are like the size of a small fingernail and dissected into slithers smaller than a millimetre. It is an intricate process which they are refining every day. Very interesting indeed!

In summing up it was a great opportunity to be part of a process which determines future legislation and to be part of a group so dedicated to their cause. Without a question this advisory group sold to me that our fishery is in the best of hands. It was very professional and it was a privilege to represent the Charter Fishing Industry for the northern region of QLD which basically starts from Mackay and upwards. Our next workshop is proposed for the end of October. ■

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The Dragon's Den

By Steve Adamson

The past month has been a case of two sides of the coin. Perfect weather for the best part of half a month then rubbish for the remainder. The Easter weekend started as doom and gloom then quickly cleared up allowing us to run for a solid two weeks, which was great because the town was pumping. To be honest the Easter period over the years has proven to be a finicky time, it is either hit or miss with people visiting the area. Well 2021 was probably the busiest I've seen in all my time in the area. Obviously people were super keen to travel domestically having had a horror time with Covid restrictions and border closures. Let's hope we don't have to experience this again. Unfortunately the back end of the month was lost to some hefty rain which easily dumped over a metre of water across the region with associated winds. I suspect this will be the last of the serious rain and have to wait and see what the south easterly winds do moving forwards.

For us on the fishing front we enjoyed some really good days and had to also endure some tougher days. The good days saw ample coral trout on the take up to 5kg, patches of decent large mouth nannygai up to 7kg and we did start to see a bit more activity on the floating mackerel lines. The usual suspects like spangled emperor were consistent along with trevally species.

Our harder trips were often tested by shark activity and these could have been bumper days quite easily. It is annoying for a couple of reasons, the first being the clients miss out on some big fish and we lose a heap of tackle. The second being the big schools we get onto are likely big breeders and they are getting demolished. I read something the other day and in WA they are having a hell of a time with the sharks and the government is starting to look into it with further research



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and techniques. It is a bit of a concern here too because when the sharks are savage, which is getting more regular, you may lose for example up to 5 good fish such as a trout just to get 1 into the boat. It is a touchy subject for the powers to be but I feel it time to address it or look into further. Our other quiet days were simply because the fish were not playing the game.

All this will change soon with the currents due to turn this coming month and push from the south. This can trigger an instant hot bite for a lot species and past history tells us the next month or so can see us go into overdrive. Nannygai in particular can flick on the switch and keep us extremely busy on the deck. Trout will move up a gear and the majority of others will follow too. Mackerel should become a more regular occurrence and always a welcome to the community chest for all to enjoy. If we get the good weather it will be on for young and old.

All indicators suggest we'll see a steady flow of tourists passing through in the next month and as the weather starts to get chilly down south it will be sure to entice a few extras. It will be pleasing to see the town slowly recover after a rough 12 months. ,

In finishing well done to Heff, our Managing Agent to be accepted onto the QLD Fisheries Advisory Board as the representative for all fishing charters in Nth Qld. ■

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Breathing in the Saltaire

By Damian Colette



Well the first half of April kept us busy enough with good numbers of tourists around and the for the most the weather was conducive to some really exciting fishing. Besides the fishing we also entertained with a fair bit of snorkeling on quite a few trips which makes up for a fun filled day.

At his time of year we like to run a mixed program with a combination of reef, light tackle and popper fishing if requested. That way we are covering all bases if one aspect proves to be a bit quieter.

The reef fishing more often than not turned it on for our clients. We came across some very impressive fish including big coral trout, red emperor, large mouth nannygai, cod, trevally and chaotic chinaman fish which tried their best to melt the drags on our reels. To be honest we didn't have to try too hard to source some cracking fish on most days.

We did spend a fair amount of time trolling lures on the pressure points of reefs and along the edges. Even our bottom fishing spots holding a good supply of bait were worth running over with the lures. We caught our fair share of spanish mackerel ranging between mostly 5-8kg. Even at this size using 6-8kg outfits these are an exciting fish to catch with their incredible bursts of speed. I don't care what anyone thinks but mackerel is probably the most agreeable fish that everyone loves on the palate. I haven't come across anyone who has ever thought it was average to eat.

We also completed quite a few stints popper fishing for the avid sports fisherman. Many did it

for the first time and they soon realise you definitely need a good level of fitness to continually cast big poppers over a good distance and retrieve it back to the boat time and time again. During the calmer days we were able to spot the nervous bait schools on the edges of the reef getting pushed to the surface. This is a tell tale sign that a big Gt is lurking down below. The blooping lure or stick bait acts as an injured or distressed fish and being the most aggressive of fish, the Gt will look to end its existence. We caught a range of sizes ranging from 12-20kg and ticked the bucket list for several clients.

The back end of April saw some proper wet season rain halting proceedings but as it often happens this will hopefully be the last hurrah. This last batch of rain will distribute a lot of bait around and I'm hoping it will bring on the small black marlin in the coming months on the grounds we target them. The expected cooler southern currents due anytime will enhance our prospects in this department. Either way we've got good fishing all round to enjoy moving forward. ■



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Local Fishing Initiative

By Phil 'Bones' Laycock



As most of you reading this are avid fisherman I encourage you to get involved and support the inception of a Community Recreational Fishing development strategy for the Douglas Shire. Some of you may recognise my name as I lived and worked (Quicksilver) in Port Douglas for 17 years until the mid 2000's. I have then did a long stint working for GBRMPA. You may recognise me by my nickname "Bones", living now in Newell Beach.

The Douglas Shire council and the Douglas Local Marine Advisory Committee have asked me to support the community to develop a Recreational Fishing industry development plan focusing on community values, business development and the sustainability of the local fishery. They have put funding behind this project and have already hosted a community meeting in February which I facilitated.

A second meeting was held recently on Tuesday 20th April at the Port Douglas Community Hall from 5:30pm to 7:00pm.

This community workshop aimed to identify the issues and opportunities that if addressed can help the future sustainability and growth of recreational fishing, associated business development and fishing tourism in the Douglas Shire.

While many of the issues that we have heard recently have been around the community for a long time (e.g. sustainability of net fishing, poor stewardship by recreational anglers, lack of support from tourism marketing bodies) this is the first time where dollars have been invested to address these issues and consult the community broadly on solutions and opportunities to improve the

situation. You all should be encouraged by this and make the most of the opportunity this financial investment presents to all of us who are passionate about the future of fishing and the businesses depending on it in the Douglas Shire.

The main issues brought to light out of this last meeting included the following:

- Eliminate all netting in the Douglas Shire
- Create a focused Destination Concept for the Shire for fishing
- Promote a Local Brand which captures Best Compliance Practices & Sustainability
- Business assistance & development
- Branding the Shire with fishing as part of the component as an Adventure Destination
- Understanding and promoting the economical importance of fishing to the Shire and beyond
- Focused effort to promote to Australia & the World we are a world class fishing destination
- Permit extensions for some Recreational Charters to cater for the tourists
- Create a culture that we are at the forefront of looking after our fishery for the future
- Create a Stewardship for Codes of Conduct for all to follow
- Undertake data collection and overall management procedure from professional operators

If you were not present at this last forum please feel free to give me a call if you have questions or would like to discuss any points of view you may have.

My contact details are:

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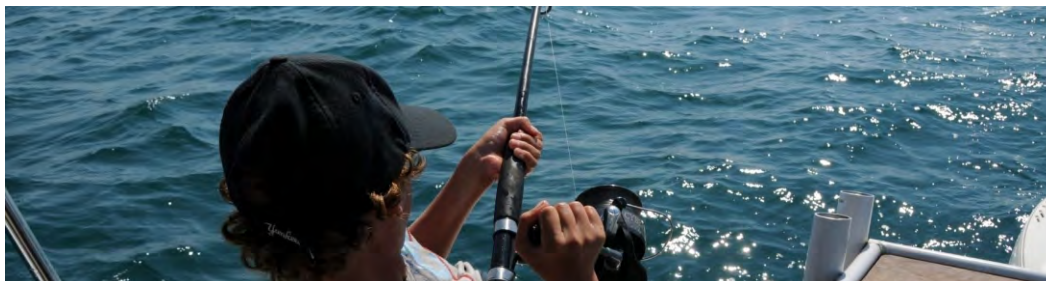


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Economic Fishing Data FNQ

By Heff



As being part of the Reef Line Fishery Advisory Board I was able to tap into the latest data collected from an economical point of view which I will share. There is a lot of information to digest, some 70 pages in fact, but here's a snapshot of what I was able to dissect. For the purpose of the exercise I will just concentrate on the Coral Reef Line Fishery which does take in actual Commercial Fishing including the Live Coral Trout sector in our Wet Tropics Region. These figures are based over an average of data collected in most recent times. Charter Fishing is included in these figures but I suspect they are much more positive than depicted. The overall sample taken was 15% of the industry which is considered a good indicator by model experts.

Total Active Businesses - 241

Rate of Net Economic Return - 8%

Rate of Return on Total Working Capital for Operators - 3.9%

Average Licence Value - \$251,515

Average Employment - 2.2 people

Economic Region Value for Entire QLD Fishery - approx. 12%

Direct Commercially Based Line Fished Operators including Charters and other fishing sectors contribute approx. 75% of all income generated by fishing activity. The other 25% is considered flow on effect such as processing, exports, tackle shops and retail etc..

Standard of Living - Positive (currently)

Safety on the Water - Positive

Health & Well Being - Positive (for the moment)

Future Security - Negative

Current Income generated - 50%

Negative

Predicted Income - 50% Negative

Fishing Regulations Imposed - 15% Extremely Negative (too much red tape)

For the Same Pay currently would I choose a different Vocation - 95% yes

Changing Regulations in Commercial Fishing make it Difficult - 95% yes

Highest Education Level Attained in Industry - Majority Yr 10 or Trade Certificate

Average Age - 55-60 Highest, 45-50 Next & 25-30 Third

In Summary, Commercial fishing operations in Australia are not risk free. Returns can be impacted both positively and negatively by factors such as natural events, changes in market conditions, disease, and management regulations. Determining the opportunity cost of capital involves an assessment of the degree of financial risk involved in the activity. For a risk-free operation, an appropriate opportunity cost of capital might be the long-term real rate of return on government bonds. The greater the risks involved, the greater is the necessary return on capital to justify the investment in that particular activity.

As mentioned this is an overall view which I felt necessary to display. Making a viable living out of fishing does have its obvious challenges ahead. It will go through ebbs and flows moving forward as with any livelihood that chooses to work the land or sea for a living. From what I've gathered those that do are extremely passionate about what they do and the challenge is for the younger generation to continue this hard but rewarding style of life.

The economic impacts are important for the QLD State and thus the huge investment by our government to get this right. ■

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Local Service Rods & Reels

By 'Sharky' Shane Down



In more recent times I've really got into the concept of fixing up my old broken rods and also servicing reels which had seemed to give up the ghost. With a bit of research and also acquiring the basic parts with ease, it has been a self taught exercise which I'm glad to say I'm very efficient at.

I've also got into the habit of going to local garage sales which are off-loading really cheap outfits because the seller has thought the combination was terminally ill. Just as a recent example I picked up a Shimano TLD 25 combination for \$15. Once I pulled the reel apart it was evident to me what the problem was so I ordered the parts and before you know it I had a well oiled set of gear ready to take on the best fish in the tropics. Now an outfit like this bought off the shelf is around \$300 plus in the shops and around \$250 on line. With a good supply parts in my possession and wanting to improve my skills, I approached Steve from the Dragon Lady vessel to see if had any rods and reels that needed attention. As it turned out he had a box of reels that needed parts and bearings replaced plus a shelf full of rods with broken tips and guides. He was glad for the service being constantly too busy to deal with this type of job. It also meant he didn't have to travel any distance by letting the job to go to an outside source. At the end of the exercise he was wrapped with the quality of workmanship I had completed.

Next off the cuff was Heff of Fishing Port Douglas which had acquired several

broken outfits over the years and had them sitting around collecting dust. He was of the same opinion that it was always in the back of his mind to get done but never got around to it.

Now I'm sure there are dozens and dozens of you out there locally that have a stash of gear needing attention but haven't got around to it. Being local it is easy to exchange and I'll get the job done within a few days. That favourite reel or rod will be back in action before you know it. My rates are far more competitive than any other service available in the area plus the turn around is very prompt. The parts I use are the best you can source and not that cheap crap often readily available on-line.

So if you have any gear that needs resurrecting contact details are below. You'll save some good coin on the gear you already have. All jobs are priced on an individual basis. I'm also open to any old TLD Shimano's you may look to throw in the bin. I can re-use the insides for parts.

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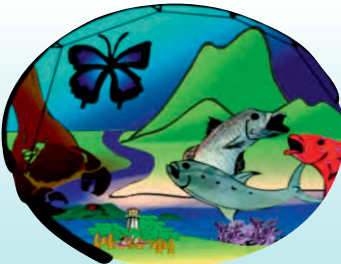


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On the Daintree Charters

With Jamie Beitzel



By 'gingoes' it has been an extremely busy period for us up on the Daintree. My diary tells me I did 21 days straight from the end of March to the middle of April and then it slowed down just a tad for the remainder of the month. When it's like this you just get into such a routine that the days somehow just seem to fly by. My energy levels remained very good and it's great to see the area flooded with tourists again. Talking about flooding the only reason why bookings dropped off a tad in the third week of April was because with that weather system we copped a really good drop of rain. It put the river into a minor flood and it coincided with some big tides which is no good trying to catch people fish. Over just a few days we received several hundred millimetres of rain just to give you an idea of what we are talking about. I always suspected the wet season had one last effort in it to dump as much as it could in FNQ. This however sets up the river and coast for some really exciting times ahead.

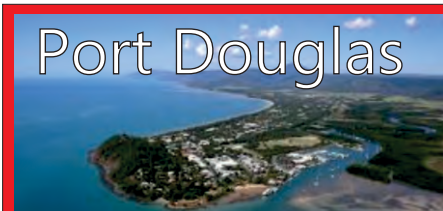
The fishing when things are right has been really productive. We had a fantastic run of weather for quite a few weeks which did allow me to explore the Daintree coastline. My time spent here saw me conjure up some good mackerel as well as some big queenfish which can frequent the Snapper Island waters. The bottom fishing was also good securing my quota of big large mouth nannygai. With this latest burst of rain the coast will be inundated with a healthy

supply of bait and there will be all sorts of critters around for the spoils. The various trevally species will also join the party creating some very exciting fishing ahead for the sport fisherman.

The river fishing of late has been awesome and one of my favourite times of the year to concentrate my efforts. All my main target species have been very accommodating and it hasn't been overly hard to nail some of the best river fish you could hope for.

Barra have been receptive, even though you need to spend a bit more time to entice them into a bite. The grunter or javelin fish have been just superb across the flats and they've been on the large size. 50cm plus grunter have been frequent and they are happy to snivel down a big live bait or just as content to slurp down a fresh dead bait. The likes of golden and river giant trevally have been ample and have at times littered the river system. So there's been no shortage of action with this species. My river fingermark have not let me down and they've been constantly between the 50-60cm range. At this size they pull really hard and the reward on the plate is mouth watering.

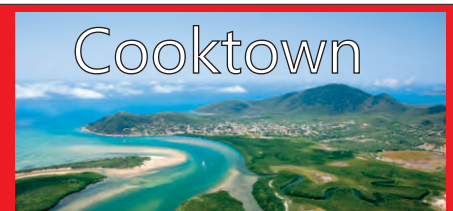
Looking ahead the coming weeks should remain very positive before our winter properly kicks in. In saying that we always have plenty of different fish to tangle with up here. Bookings remain strong moving forward and we hope to See You Up on the Daintree or Nearby Soon ... ■



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Reel Cooking with Mick Hart Shellfish Pasta



As the nights start to chill down this a simple hearty and warm meal which will keep your taste buds zinging.

INGREDIENTS

400g spaghetti
 ¼ cup (60ml) extra virgin olive oil
 12 large green prawns
 1 onion, finely chopped
 4 garlic cloves, chopped
 2 tsp finely grated ginger
 4 truss tomatoes, chopped
 ½ cup (125ml) white wine
 Finely grated zest and juice of ½ lemon
 500g mussels in shell
 ¼ cup (60ml) pure (thin) cream



METHOD

Cook pasta until al dente, then drain, reserving 1/3 cup (80ml) cooking water. Set pasta aside.

Heat 1 tbs oil in a large, deep frypan over medium-high heat. Add the prawns and cook for 1-2 minutes each side, then remove from pan. Add remaining 2 tbs oil, reduce heat to medium and add onion. Cook for 3-4 minutes until softened. Add garlic and ginger and cook for 1 minute until fragrant, then add the tomatoes and cook for a further 2-3 minutes. Add the wine, reserved water and lemon. Add the Mussels and return the prawns to the pan. Cover to steam and cook for 3-4 minutes until the mussels have opened. Add pasta and cream. Toss to coat.

Add garnish or fresh herbs to your liking.



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magical daintree

Croc Hatchling Media Rush with Bruce Belcher

It's been good to see hatchling crocodiles this year whereas two years ago all the nests were destroyed in a big flood. We have been fortunate this year watching two nests and we had a surprise third nest producing hatchlings in behind Pig Island. I normally describe hatching results at anywhere between 5-15 babies, but this year's results were better: 20 and 26 hatchlings. Both females were mistakenly thought to be males in the first place.

We have often talked about one of them particularly, Scooter. It was born in 2002 and we were led to believe it was a male, by an expert. We have since learnt that the gender cannot be determined when they are very young. So, we were proven wrong.

During November we found the first nest and I began my procedure of planning ahead for the expected hatching during February. So, in November I contacted WIN TV news desk, arranged for a cameraman and a presenter to be here to record the hatchlings with the mother at the new creche. This is something that I have always done, and it is expected of me whenever the opportunity arose. It is one of the highlights of the year on the Daintree River. This was to be presented during the evening news.

On the 2nd of March, my son Griff, found 26 hatchlings belonging to Scooter, behind Pig Island. He radioed me immediately and I set about arranging it with WIN TV to visit at low tide during the next couple of days.

As I sat back at home that night in anticipation of the event, I had a phone call from a friend at about 9.00pm. He said that we had been beaten to the post by a rival operator who had obviously arranged to do the same thing through the media. I thought this was unethical.

I phoned WIN the next morning and cancelled, explaining the situation. When I found out which of my rivals had beaten me, I was disappointed. This man is one that I have often referred to as the best guide on the river. I have also described him as an asset to tourism. We work together closely. We chat on the 2-way radio. So, I guess that you can say that he rained on my parade!



I have always been proud of the way I conduct myself as a guide on the river. I believe in honesty, etiquette, courtesy, and respect. I have always maintained a good relationship with fellow guides. I will continue to be polite regardless of what has happened.

The rival operates a so called "solar powered boat" which is an electric boat with large storage batteries recharged every night from a 240-volt power source. Now, we all know that 240 voltage comes from a dirty old coal fired power station! The owner will tell you that it is "solar assisted" which is a bit like me saying I have methane powered undies; the harder I fart, the more motion I get!

See you next month.



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