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**Front Cover: Conrad Hinz with a Dickson Inlet Mangrove Jack**



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## Lure Colour - Does it Matter ??

By Dylan Case - Nautical Marine

"What colour lures work the best around here?" This is probably the most common question I get asked in the shop, and it is not the simplest to answer. The obvious thought would be to choose a colour that matches a prey item as closely as possible, as this is what a lure is trying to represent to a predatory fish. However, there is an enormous variety of colours that are far from "natural", and many anglers find success in these bright and strikingly coloured lures. Most people have their favourite colours, but is this because they are the most effective?

The first thing we should look at is how colours actually appear underwater. Colours are our visual interpretation of different wavelengths of light. Because water filters out light, colours become less and less apparent the deeper you go. If you have even been snorkelling or diving, you will notice that colours are significantly brighter at the surface, and gradually dull the deeper you go. Colours become duller as soon as you are below the surface of the water and start to completely disappear as shallow as around 5m. Only around 10% of all light penetrates deeper than 30m. Water quality and clarity affects how fast and which colours disappear first, but in clear water, red is the first colour to disappear followed by orange, yellow and green. Blues are generally the last colour to disappear. Of course, this is not necessarily applicable to lure colour

selection, but it gives you an idea of how underwater organisms may perceive and respond to colours.

It is important to consider that the perception of colour is completely dependant on whether it can be registered by the receptors within an eye. As humans, our eyes are relatively complex, and can easily detect colours, as well as movement, shapes, contrast etc. However, most other animals have far less complex eyes than our own, and cannot see the full colour spectrum. It's difficult to say exactly which colours a fish can and can't see, and colour perception would vary between species, but it is reasonable to assume that they are certainly not perceiving colour as effectively as humans.

CONTINUED PAGE 10



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## Exceed Sportfishing

By Jake Wyatt

Wind, wind and more wind. What's going on with this bloody wind this year. It has been nothing short of frustrating and when you think we might get a run at it the south easterlies kick in hard again. We have managed to get out to the reef on a couple of occasions this past month although majority of the trips have been coastal and up the river.

The reef fishing has been fantastic when we have braved the wind with great catches of big bar cheek trout, cobia and many other cool, hard hitting species including nannygai.

Plastics and micro jigging has been the main form of fishing for us. We find that you can catch such a wide variety of species both big and small fish in the same location. One of my favourite fish to target would be the Golden Trevally. These cool looking, dogged fighting fish are fantastic fun on the light tackle gear and battle right to the end. Cobia are another species that fight very hard also. They tend to come up to the boat fairly easy and then do an absolutely smoking run back to the depths. They certainly don't like the sight of human life and go to a new level. We have been catching them in pairs which is often the case and all have been released to fight another day.

The surface action has also been pretty action packed when we've been able to get out. Fishing across the top of the reefs and bommies is always great fun. Seeing a big shadow come up behind a lure working

away across the surface is adrenalin filled. When the fish makes connection and the rod buckles over and the reels starts to bellow, well it doesn't get any better. The first few moments are very intense particularly for the angler. GT's and good size trout have been loving the stick baits and smaller sized Nomad Mad Scads. Quality lures with indestructable hooks and split rings are essential to lock and load these fish away from the reefs. I never get tired of this sort of fishing.

When the wind blows we have been fishing up the river with some great fishing also. The mangrove jacks have been on fire lately with up to 6 being landed in a session. XL sized bream have been great fun in the shallows on light gear with a few surprises mixed in like black jewfish and good sized fingermark. Just because it's windy at the reef does not mean the rivers don't hold good fish. We are now offering night time trips also to coincide with the right tides. This will enable us target certain species and really offer personalised trips to people who want to give it a try. I'm a big believer that our local rivers and creeks tend to see the bigger fish come out to play after dark.

Hopefully the wind drops down soon so we can really start to get out there get amongst the hard fishing 'reefies'. We will be focusing on jigging a lot more this season and exploring new ground. Can't wait.

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# The Dragon's Den

By Steve Adamson

The month of May started off in fine fashion with moderate winds and there were a few keen anglers floating around town. Then mid month the south easterly trade winds kicked into gear and it was a week and a bit of solid 25 knots. Very few boats left the harbour that week including us as we were left in the docks doing odd jobs to fill in the days. To date this year we have been dealt quite a few runs of bad weather and as frustrating as it is, there's nothing we can do about it. However conditions improved towards the end of the month and we began rolling out charters once again. This coincided with the Carnivale weekend and we were pleasantly surprised to be fully booked. In previous years we have found Carnivale to be quiet for us as people are in town for the festivities, or so we assumed. Well this year people extended their activities to the water which was a bonus for us.

Leading into May I predicted it was going to be a bumper month on the fish and I wasn't let down. To be honest I find it to be one month on the calendar when the reef fish of all varieties hit their straps. Naturally you need the weather on your side to tap into the spoils. We had significant numbers of fish caught on all our trips this past month. Depending on where we fished it was either the large mouth or small mouth nannygai which tended to dominate catches. The coral trout were really handy on most days and these fish were backed up with spangled emperor, red emperor, plus the trevally trio of golden's, gold spot and bludgers. The spanish mackerel were ticking over on the float rig but it was the cobia which stole the lime light in this department. Most trips we came back with multiple fish and they were solid in size. If you look back through the log book in the past 6 months you'll find we caught cobia probably on 75% of our trips. They really have turned it on in recent times.

Pictured below is a screen shot of our sounder which was typical for most of the month. As you can see it was no wonder why the fishing was really good especially for the nannygai in the 35m plus depth range. With currents and wind running in the same direction it makes our job so much easier to anchor up on these marks and hook into the fish. With the air and water temperature dropping continually we are also finding that the fish are biting for most of the day as well.

Looking ahead my sources tell me that the tourist trade will really kick into gear at the start of June which will be very welcomed following a soft trading period for the first 6 months. The fishing will continue to fire on all fronts with the spanish mackerel being the big improver for my monthly prediction. The only downside is the threat of the south easterly winds but I'm remaining positive for a better run of weather.



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## The Magic of the Mitchell

By 'Sharky' Shane Down

Before I get into the crux of this story I did early May get in a beach fish on Four Mile in between the winds. Using live mullet and garfish I caught two barra, one at 68cm and the other just undersize at 55cm. So for all you beach faring enthusiasts there's still a chance for a barra. These were caught early morning but as the days get cooler I reckon they'll be more responsive after a low tide during the day when the sun is heating up the sand and the incoming tide starts to roll in. The barra will look for these types of warm pockets up in the shallows.

Anyway moving on, every year mid May I head to the Mitchell River for a bit of R & R on my birthday. With the 4WD, camper trailer and boat all packed me and the pup made our way up to Hurricane Station. I had pre-booked a camp spot along the river and the beauty of this is that you are guaranteed to see no-one as their allocated sites are 5km apart. The other bonus is it is probably only 90 minutes away and you are basically in another world.

Following the greeting from the station owners it was off to a site I hadn't tried before. No matter where you end up the Mitchell River it is just simply stunning. Pristine waters draped with mellalueca

trees and white sandy beaches are synonymous with this unique landscape. As soon as you arrive the troubles of the world disappear in a flash. All you can hear is the trickling of the river, bird calls and the occasional cow way off in the background. This particular site I was very impressed with being nice and flat and being able to launch the boat would be easy. The river was nice and wide and appeared to have kilometres of water to explore. I was keen to get amongst it.

In complete relax mode I took my time setting up the camp trailer and positioning the boat down on the river bank. I searched the immediate area for enough firewood to suffice for at least the first night. I would need to source some more from elsewhere the following day.

With the camp fire in motion I boiled up some spuds and sweet potato to put in the crab pots. Over time I have found it to be a quite effective bait in attracting our crustacean friends. I then set the pots at intervals along the bank. I like to place them where there is a big overhanging tree with a bit of a sand bank leading into the shallows. That way the pots will land on a nice flat spot knowing the claw and cherabin can't get



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underneath and have no choice but to go through the intended designated hole at either end. I also like to put a pot in the very shallows next to camp. You'll be surprised what comes in to investigate right before your eyes. The rest of the afternoon was spent chilling out, reading a book, sipping on a coldie and taking in the tranquillity of this magical place. There's nothing better than a camp cook up on the fire and an old fashioned meat and veg dish was prepared on dark. At 8pm I did a check of the pots and was pleased to find 8 good sized red claw already for the keeping. I was happy with this start. Along the way I spotted several varieties of native frog life with the torch which is pretty cool. Not long after this it was into the fart sack for an early night.

Prior to dawn the body alarm clock went off and first task was to stoke the fire and put the kettle on. Next priority was to check the pots before any sign of the sun coming up. I have found, and particularly with the cherabin is that once the sun is up they will find their way out of the pots. I secured a further dozen plump sized red claw and just the single cherabin. I was already building up a nice little stock of crustacean delights. Back to camp it was time for a coffee and watch the sunrise. There's something so special watching and listening to the bush awakening for a new day. The mist comes off the water and the ripples start to dance in the sunlight and the birds, well they are at fever pitch with their calls. With sun now well and truly up I did a quick of the pots again and managed a further two good sized red claw.

It was then time to take the tinny for a run up the river in the early morning. It is the perfect time to spot a variety of birds and hopefully a fresh croc or two. It was just so relaxing to spend the next hour or so exploring the intricate subtleties of this stunning system.

Back to camp and I looked at the sorry state of my firewood supply. So I fired up the 4WD and went for a drive. I ventured further west to the next campsite which was 5km away and unoccupied. It was a very pretty spot but there was no real spot to launch the boat and the river was quite narrow. On the way back to camp I had already taken note of some nice old fallen trees on the side of the track. With the chainsaw activated I soon accumulated enough top notch firewood to last easily for the next

couple of days. Along the way back I was intermittently gaining radio reception. You'd go 10m further on and you would lose it. So with a bit of going backwards and forwards I finally got reasonable reception. I sat for awhile listening to the ABC for the update on the looming Tropical Cyclone Ann which was expected to impact the area with associated rain. I took heed and watched the skies for the remainder of the day considering I was camped right on the river. Any substantial rain dumped on the Dividing Range further east can change this landscape in a heartbeat.

Back at camp it was the duty to unload all the wood and then cook up a late 'brekky' of bacon and eggs. With the essentials done it was back in the boat with a rod and lure to see if I could rustle up some sooty grunter. I travelled as far upstream as possible and then drifted back down with the current flicking lures as I went. As opposed to previous years, the fishing was surprisingly very slow and I only managed to boat one small sooty. Anyway it was still a treat watching nature pass by at snail's pace spotting various birds including a couple of sea eagles perched up in a tree. It's amazing how quickly time can pass when you don't wear a watch and I arrived back at camp at 4pm. →



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**Mitchell River Cont ...**

Darkness can sneak up on you pretty quickly in the bush so it was time to organise dinner which would be red claw pasta and it was to die for. I don't care what anyone says but fresh red claw, or even cherabin is a true delicacy.

The discarded heads of the 'claw' I put in the pot closest to the camp in the shallows. After dinner I checked the pots again and secured a further 4 red claw and a cherabin. After dark the pot with the yabby heads next to camp were attracting some critters and it was pretty cool to observe with the aid of my head torch. Some big sleepy cod were lurking around and a couple of big turtles turned up. They would overnight eventually rip the net apart with their beaks to get to the bait.

The following morning I was up at 'sparrows'. The morning collect on the pots yielded a wonderful bounty of 15 red claw and a solitary cherabin. This haul as it eventuated would be taken back home to

Port. As I sat and drank my coffee watching the wilderness wake up it bloody started to drizzle with rain and slowly got heavier. Oh you rotten '#@\*+!' sod I thought. I was half expecting it having listened to the forecast the day before on the radio. Knowing what may lay ahead I begrudgingly packed up camp in rather quick fashion. I was unaware how heavy or how much had fallen back on the ranges to the east and was keen to get out. My main concern was Bushy Creek at Julatten on the way home which can flood very quickly. If it was in flood it would put an extra 2hrs on the trip having to go back via Kuranda and Cairns. Luckily this was not the case but Bushy Creek was fairly lively when I drove past. My trip was cut short by a day but at least I had another batch of tasty morsels to take home and cook up another feast that night. I'll endeavour every year to return to the Mitchell on my birthday. You couldn't ask for a better present. ■



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# Doing the Hard Yards

By Conrad Hinz

Hi my name is Conrad Hinz, 19yrs of age and I'm a born and bred local lad who is fishing mad. I came through the Mossman High School, my Dad is a local tiler, I have two sisters aged 12 & 21 and a twin brother named Carl. Since I can remember I've fished since I was knee height to a grasshopper.

I spend copious amounts of time fishing with my close mate, Fraser Allen who has been decking on the Dragon Lady Charter boat the past couple of years. He's been able to arrange some days work on the boat when they are super busy and I really enjoy the opportunity. In our spare time though Fraser and I religiously fish the local rivers and creeks and do the majority of it by foot. There are not many places where you can fish on a nice exposed bank and catch quality fish on a regular basis. We invariably find ourselves right up in the upper reaches trudging through the mozzie and sandfly infested mangroves looking for small openings and flick lures where no man or boat has been. It is pretty hardcore fishing to say the least, especially on those stinking hot days and you somehow build up a bit of a tolerance to ever present insects. A long sleeved shirt is definitely mandatory and I always carry a back pack with plenty of water and a snake compression bandage just in case. I carry whatever tackle I think I need and importantly a mobile phone. When doing this style of fishing I prefer no foot wear. I believe feeling the true ground underneath is much safer particularly when you are dealing with slippery banks. Finally as a precaution I always let someone back home where we are intending on fishing. It is very unforgiving terrain we often go and thus the appeal for me.


Recently Fraser and I found ourselves deep in the jungle right up in the far reaches of the Dickson Inlet following the bank of a small unsuspecting arm of the system. We began our trek with the tide just beginning to fall. I find this is the best time to fish these tight bodies of water as the bait drops into the pools with the tide and they have nowhere

to hide. We had fished this branch before and had half a dozen spots to try where we had the slightest of room to flick a lure. We both have an inkling for the Zerek Prawn and Z Mann soft plastic lures in these circumstances and I had my trusty Curado baitcaster loaded with 50lb Finz braid and 60lb leader. Fishing in such a tight environment means you must lock and load when you hook up to a fish.


Hopping from small clearing to small clearing the bait was noticeably getting nervous, something was due to happen. Upon reaching a bit more open country it was on my third cast that dreams are made of. At the time I had a Z Manns soft plastic retrieving slowly back to the bank just under the water. It's hard to put into words but from out of nowhere a huge bucket type mouth appeared and inhaled the lure with an almighty 'boof'. The noise echoed throughout the confinements of the creek. Then I saw the gigantic silver frame turn sideways and I knew it was quite considerable in size. That first surge was something I had never experienced before. My arms were nearly pulled out of their sockets and I hung on for dear life. Not long after this big girl tried to jump out of the water only managing to get half way. That's a classic sign of a big fish because of their sheer weight. It was a very nervous 5-10 minutes of intense angling. My heart felt like it was going to pop out of my chest and I know my knees were trembling - what an adrenalin rush !! Fraser came to my side and offered support which was truly appreciated as I was trying to get it onto the bank. Once fully revealed it was like 'Holy Cow', she was huge. At 92cm on the tape and as fat as cat, it was my personal best ever barra - what a moment. After some very happy snaps she was released with pleasure. At this size she would be a big breeder and still had years of work ahead of her.


Following this incredible catch not long after Fraser hooked into a ripping barra which came flying out of the water. ▶







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**HARD YARDS Cont ...** In the enclosed mangle of mangroves the noise was like it was coming from surround sound speakers as it thumped back into the water time and time again. This fish had much more capability of staying on top and out of the water as opposed to the giant. Fraser did a great job curbing this beauty as it tired out after a few surging runs towards the end. Once banked we knew it was another cracker fish and it went 78cm on the tape. At this point we felt invincible, masters of our domain.

This carnage created a bit of a chain reaction because soon after I got crunched by a serious mangrove jack which gave me heaps of grief. These guys know only one gear and that's full tilt. It tried to bury me several times into the mangrove roots and I literally had to skull drag it back into the open water. This fish tested me in every capacity



**LURE SELECTION Cont ...**

However, it is thought that most fish, while limited in their detection of colour, can perceive other visual aspects such as movement, shape and silhouettes reasonably well. Accordingly, it is probably important to focus on these aspects of visual lure presentation rather than colour selection...

It is worth acknowledging here that a fishes' perception of a certain colour (or lack of) in a particular scenario does not dictate whether or not it bites. Just because a fish can see the colour of your lure doesn't mean it will eat it! In saying this, certain colour combinations may indeed be marginally more desirable to a fish in a particular scenario, but there are many other factors to consider which are far more significant in terms of getting the bite! So, if colour seemingly takes a back seat to things like lure action, shape and presentation, how do these favourite colours that anglers swear by arise?

Many "go to" colours appear to arise as a result of pure random chance. If an angler went out fishing and caught most of their fish on a particular colour, they would probably be more likely to use that colour again and again. Confidence plays a huge part in this as well. If the

angler already has confidence in a certain colour, having caught plenty of fish on it in the past, they will be happy to throw that colour around even if it isn't producing fish. Conversely, anglers tend to second guess themselves if a new or unusual colour does not produce fish straight away and will often revert back to their favourites. This results in fishermen throwing their favourite colour far more than anything else, with each capture positively reinforcing the apparent effectiveness of that colour. So, someone may catch 95% of their fish on gold colours, but if they are fishing gold 95% of the time, this isn't a surprising statistic.

Of course, our human nature makes lure colour a hard thing to get away from. Even if we acknowledge that colour doesn't always matter a huge deal, we still feel inclined to use that one colour we caught fish on last time. This is not a bad thing, because fishing success is often affected by confidence in your gear and persistence. So, if a certain colour works for you, why not throw it? I know I do.



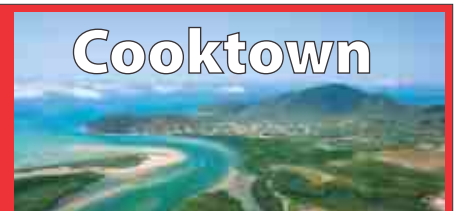
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# Reel Cooking

## with Mick Hart

### Chilli Mud Crab # 2

#### Ingredients

- 4 large crabs
- 100ml veg oil
- 2 onions diced
- 6 garlic cloves crushed
- 4 long red chilli sliced
- 100g fresh ginger grated
- 2 stalks lemon grass bruised
- 6 kaffir lime leaves, stem removed

#### Fish sauce

- 2tbsp sugar
- 2 cans crushed tomato

#### Method

Ice down the crabs and scrub off any mud left on the shell. Boil in salted water for 10min, remove and ice down keeping crabs upside down. Prepare sauce in a pot large enough to hold the crabs. Sauté onions in oil until soft. Add garlic, chilli, ginger and continue to sauté for a couple of minutes without colouring. Turn heat too low and add 2 tbsp of fish sauce, sugar, lime leaves, lemon grass and tomato.

Meanwhile begin cleaning crabs over a bowl to catch all the juices, this will be added to the sauce along with the head cheese but make sure to discard the dead mans fingers. Cut crabs into quarters and crack claws, keeping the juice as well.

Add juice and crab to sauce, toss until warmed through and serve.

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# Papua New Guinea Nationals

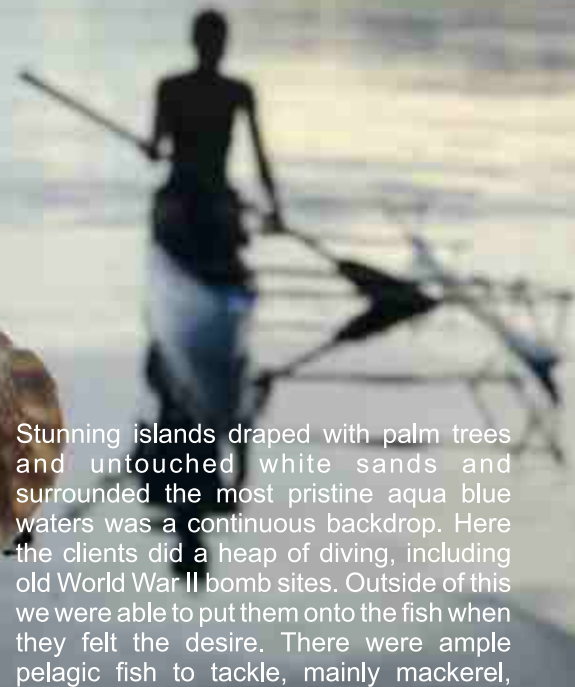
By Damian Collete - Saltaire Charters

Hi there everyone, it's been a little while since my last report but it has been for a very good reason. At the start of April we put in motion a grand trip which would see myself and my son Jake take the Saltaire boat to new horizons. Prior to this we completed a major maintenance program on the slipway in Cairns bringing the boat to its very best, basically brand new on the eye.

I had fished the Papua New Guinea National Game Fishing Titles the past several years, albeit skippering on different vessels. This year I was determined to take the Saltaire boat across the Coral Sea to this amazing fishing destination for the 9 day tournament.

take 2.5 days of continuous travel through the expansive Coral Sea. The weather was on our side so it was smooth travelling.

We arrived at Alotau and re-provisioned the vessels with the necessary requirements. From here both vessels travelled to the region known as the Louisiades and Conflict Islands for 11 days. If you ever imagined the most beautiful tropical post card, then this is where it is. To put it simply it is mind blowing - God's tropical garden.



What made it viable was a trip prior to the tournament with a crew of local constituents who utilised the 115ft Spirit Wavepiercer vessel as a mothership and utilising the Saltaire vessel for fishing and other activities. This part of the adventure would see us land east of Port Moresby.

Departing from Cairns first we had to clear customs before leaving. Having dealt quite a few times with this necessary authority it went relatively smooth. Under tow behind the luxurious Spirit vessel we began this much anticipated journey. Splitting from the Great Barrier Reef at the Opal Reef we steamed in a straight line for Alotau in PNG. It was a 450 nautical mile trip which would

Stunning islands draped with palm trees and untouched white sands and surrounded the most pristine aqua blue waters was a continuous backdrop. Here the clients did a heap of diving, including old World War II bomb sites. Outside of this we were able to put them onto the fish when they felt the desire. There were ample pelagic fish to tackle, mainly mackerel, dolphin fish and tunas. The reef fishing was awesome including a most beautiful species which I'm guessing is a sub species of coral trout - amazing looking fish. It was a very hard place to leave, untouched in its purest form.

We then travelled back to an area known as the East Cape. We didn't do a lot of fishing here but it was all about the villages, their people and visiting the most amazing landscapes including spectacular waterfalls and primitive skull caves. This is honestly one of the last wilderness frontiers on the planet inhabited by human life. If you ever get the chance to access this amazing part of the world grab it with both hands.



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event catching 2 blue marlin and a sailfish. This was extremely satisfying having travelled all this way and is a great notch in our belt.

The grounds we fished were mainly around the seamounts and shelf drop offs which could fall to 2000m deep. The organisers also created 5 fads which were good for targeting dolphin fish and tuna. Each boat was fitted with a Pro Tracker device so everyone knew where everybody was fishing at any given time. This could come up on your boat screen and it was also shown on a big screen back at the clubhouse. A lot of the locals would pop into clubhouse to watch the live score unfold each day. It was also a great way of establishing where the hot bite was happening and you could change plans if you needed to.

Now down to the National Titles - we left the Spirit mothership and travelled solo from Alotau to Port Moresby which took a couple of days. There's plenty to see along the way which made the time pass quickly. Each year the tournament is rotated around from 4 different locations in PNG and it was Port Moresby this year. Around 30 boats were there this time to compete over 9 days. The format is that 4 different teams fish for 2 days on each boat in the overall competition. Species that count included mackerel, dolphin fish, tuna, wahoo and of course billfish. On the middle day of the tournament there is a separate Billfish Shootout Day where only marlin and sailfish score.

We fared reasonably well in the overall competition catching a variety of pelagic fish each day for our teams. It was the Billfish Shootout where we really fired and won the



whilst we waited. This was good to do it at a leisurely pace. Finally three of us local boats made the dash home across the straits. We travelled as a pack for safety reasons. After a couple of days of travelling we made it to Jewel Reef north of Lizard Island where we rafted up for the night and then parted ways the following day and made our own way back home. It was an epic journey and a fantastic month and a bit in a very unique part of the world. I'm glad to say the boat made it home in one piece and we had no dramas in this department.

In my opinion the Papua New Guinea Nationals is by far the best tournament going around and if you would like to partake one day give us a holler at Saltaire Charters. As a package the fishing, the organisation of the event and the social aspect surpasses anything we have over here. The best way is to fly to PNG and join us there. We have committed for 2020. You won't be disappointed if you take the plunge.



The big appeal about this tournament, apart from the fishing, is the social aspect. Each night everyone would gather back at the clubhouse for big sponsor nights and local indigenous entertainment. It was brilliant fun to say the least. The organisers pull out all stops to ensure each night is huge with something different happening each evening.

After a monster tournament it was time to think about coming home. As it eventuated it took 2 weeks for a suitable break in the weather to get home. Quite a few skippers flew back to Cairns in the interim waiting for the opportunity and then flew back to PNG when it came. We opted to stay in Port Moresby taking in more of the local sights



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# Port Douglas Fishing Charters

By Adam Boone

Having spent the first couple of weeks away of the past month it was great to get back home in Port Douglas. You sometimes don't realise just how lucky we are to live where we are.

Getting back into town it was obvious the weather wasn't too crash hot and had been much the case for most of my time away from what I gathered. The winds had taken a strangle hold and it was a creek program on the cards. With cool winds sweeping across the tropics and overcast days the local inlet was sure to have changed in landscape in regards to the fish on offer.

Upon returning up the local inlet there were a couple of notable differences. There was definitely a lot more traffic which was no surprise considering all small boats had no chance of heading offshore. The second was that the water temperature had dropped by a couple of more degrees and was hovering around 24.8 degrees celcius in the main parts of the channel. To combat this I focused a lot of my time in the extremities of the system to avoid the traffic and quite often it was in the shallower parts which offered a slightly higher water temperature. Also I found the live bait to be still plentiful which is my preferred way of enticing better fish.

To be honest the fishing surprised me somewhat considering the changes that had occurred. There were a variety of quality fishing kicking around including mangrove jack, trevally, queenfish, big grunter and big aggressive bream. The bream are a bit of a surprise packet at this time of year and are equally aggressive as say a mangrove jack. They won't hesitate to take on a big live mullet and rip it apart.

I had a few interesting encounters in recent times, the first being the dream start to any charter. Having collected live bait we anchored up on a likely spot and I cast the first rod into the strike zone for the client with a mullet on the end. I didn't even have time to hand it over because as soon as it hit the water a cracking mangrove had latched onto it. It hit like a tonne of bricks and I set the hooks. Pulling it out of the danger zone the client took over and had a good tussle bringing it to the boat.

The next couple of separate incidents involved having a couple of good sized bream attached on the other end. Both fell victim to horse sized pick handle barracuda which tore them to shreds. This happened the previous month to a mangrove jack as well. My tip for the moment whilst they are in our systems is to use the landing net to get your fish

into the boat. I've seen these 'cuda' hone in on a fish right at the side of the boat and you definitely don't want your hands anywhere near them. They don't show any fear and I suspect your hand would require some handy medical attention if whacked by one of these fish.

Looking ahead a break in the weather would be appreciated so we can all get out on the blue water and away from the sandflies. I'm hearing the grey mackerel have moved into the area and I suspect it will a good mackerel season this year. Naturally all our coastal reef species will be peaking as well. If you happened to forced back up the creeks don't forget to put your crab pots in, especially if there's a bit of run in the tide. There's been some rippers on the move recently.



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## Croc Population with Bruce Belcher



The public has a general perception that crocodile numbers in Queensland are out of control and that the rivers are infested. Contrary to this, the population is at a low density, compared to a high density, 100 years ago. Us baby boomers, in my generation, rarely saw crocs in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, as they had been hunted to the point whereby they were almost shot out. Then, once they were protected in 1974, the population started to recover. So, us baby boomers started to see them more which gives one the impression that they were increasing, not recovering. When my wife and I came here to live, in 1983, there was no talk of crocs and it wasn't until I started to work as a tour guide in 1987 that they became more noticeable. I cannot give a quantified assessment but in that time I don't think the population has changed much. So, I'm in agreement with the Queensland Government's estimate that there about 1.5 adults per km from inside the river mouth

and 50 kms upstream, compared to the historical estimates of 6 per km, 100 years ago and I believe it has stabilised. There have been reports of crocs in the Mary River, a 4 hour car drive north of Brisbane. This has surprised people to the point of declaring that they are moving south and becoming invasive. Little does the public know that before hunting, they were known to inhabit the Brisbane River, So, they were reclaiming their natural boundaries, not moving south and becoming invasive!

In the summer when the sea water temperature is 30 degrees crocs spend more time in the water as it suitably comfortable. As they are more mobile, their appetites increase and competition for food increases, forcing some crocs to move out along the beaches where they'll hunt for fish, crabs, prawns, stingrays and turtles. It is also the start of the mating season in September. So, during the winter, when they don't eat much, they'll return to the river mouth environs and are not often seen from the beaches. Hence the reason why 2,000 people can be swimming at the beach at Port Douglas, without concern. So, in the summer, not only is it too warm and uncomfortable but there is the risk of stingers.

Resort owners along the beaches have requested better croc management because of the perceived idea that the word will get out that it's too dangerous and that tourism will suffer. To the contrary, summer is the off season and it won't affect anything. Tourists won't be frightened off as we are a curious lot and tourism is flourishing, not falling away.

Why do we need croc management when the numbers are low? After all, they were persecuted for 30 years and to wish to continue to control them, in my conservative opinion, is unnecessary.

See you next month.



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# Local Bragging Board



Dragon Lady produced quite a few vibrant Golden Trevally during the month of May



Saltaire Charters with a striking set of fish related to the Coral Trout caught in Papua New Guinea



Brae Agrums caught this awesome Barra in the Dickson Inlet and cooked it up for his family



Exceed Sportfishing caught and released this Giant Trevally caught on a stick bait lure

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