Bream time in the Gippsland Lakes

Brett Geddes | June 2007 » Area Articles / Victoria & Tasmania / East Coast / Gippsland Lakes /

The Gippsland Lakes have a long history of being a real winter playground when it comes to fishing. Historically the bream action peaks at this time of year, with tailor and mullet not far behind. More recently, the last three years have also seen an incredible influx of dusky flathead. They continue to feature in this great fishery and as I predicted a few years ago, flatties probably now share an equal billing with the bream.

Flathead are being caught in the lower Mitchell River and right throughout the Tambo and Nicholson rivers. Most of these dusksies are coming in at around 45cm and it’s likely you could even get a few over 60cm. These flatties should stay on the chew for the next few months. For this issue though I want to talk more on the state of the local bream fishery, and where to catch a few.

Black Bream – crisis or not?

This is a much-debated topic amongst the many bream anglers here in Gippsland. Many believe the Gippy Lakes bream fishery is in a major decline. In contrast, some anglers are experiencing some of the best sport they could ever imagine. Some of the old boys I often talk to that fished well before carp became an introduced pest tell me of the incredible catches of years gone by. They tell tales of sitting on the bank of the Tambo River catching a bream with every cast and filling buckets or spud bags every time they fished. I remember one bloke even telling me they put the little bream back – but killed them first so they wouldn’t annoy them again!

They really believed back then that the system had a never-ending supply of bream. These same anglers today are shocked and appalled by the miserable catch rate of recent times. In fact a lot of ‘evidence’, most of it anecdotal and without scientific backup, also suggests a huge slump in bream stocks.

I wasn’t around 50 years ago, so I’m not qualified to comment on what once was, but I can’t imagine anywhere in Australia that could boast a bream a cast these days. I don’t pretend for a minute that the Gippsland Lakes bream fishery is in pristine condition, and I think the whole system needs careful monitoring for years to come. Issues like water pollution, fresh stream inflows, nutrient run off, bag limits and sustainable harvesting need constant appraisal. One thing I can tell you though: the Gippsland Lakes black bream are hardly a dying breed!

Plenty of big bream

From my point of view, the bream fishery I know and love seems to be in great shape, with regular catches of big bream to 45cm. A new generation of anglers who now target bream with lures - and usually return all of what they catch - have been spilt rotten with incredible sport over the last few seasons. Last year for instance was something of a sensation with anglers landing (and busting off!) a heap of big bream around 1.8kg. I received pictures of even bigger bream to 47cm and going 2kg before release!

Personally, over a three month period I released 315 bream in 30 outings and 11 of those fish weighed around 1.8 kg (the magical 4lb mark) or slightly better. All were caught on lures. For the whole of 2006 I released 618 bream, with most fish between 34 and 42 cm. So without meaning to brag, my point is this: from a lurefishing point of view, breaming has never been so good!

I also note that the successful bait anglers I know are using crabs, live baitfish and large prawns to get the big bream to bite, instead of more traditional baits such as sandworm or shrimp. A lot of these anglers are also fishing unweighted rigs. The message is to think outside the square and try new methods. Some of the anglers I’m meeting on the water are willing to experiment, and they are the ones having the most success.

So what about this winter?

Again this year, the bream fishing is steadily gaining momentum and all the signs are looking good for another ripper winter for catching heaps of big nasty black bream. So far frozen prawn is by far the best bait and a lot of anglers are using crab to get the bigger fish. The Tambo is firing well and even anglers fishing from the bank are getting a few. The Nicholson has a run of big bream with a lot of fish around 1kg, but you’ll need a boat to get right up above the highway bridge where most of them are hanging out. The Mitchell is always worth a try, and small bream around 30cm are common around the Silt Jetis. Hollands Landing is still very quiet and even Toms Creek is yet to fire. Try fishing the margins of Lake Victoria, around Wattle Point or Loch Sport.

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