Offshore sizzles
Phil Atkinson | May 2003 » Area Articles / New South Wales / Mid North Coast / Coffs Harbour /

The fishing off the Coffs Coast has reached its potential of late with quality fish being caught across a variety of locations and fishing styles on bait and lures.

The mackerel run continues with quality Spaniards from 14kg to more than 25kg caught on the reefs north and south of the harbour. The shoals off Bundagen are still popular among the bigger trailer-boat brigade. Quality slimy mackerel baits have been caught on inshore reefs off Boambee, Sawtell and Bonville beaches on quick stopovers during the long run south to Bundagen.

Spotted mackerel are the most common and some excellent spotties to 7kg have come onto the bite from 500 metres to 5km offshore. Unlike Spanish mackerel, which usually require a quality live or trolled bait to get their interest, spotties will respond well to a cubed pilchard berley trail and some fresh whole pilchards drifted back on 13kg wire and a twin-hook rig on a 6kg or 8kg overhead or threadline outfit.

To the north of Coffs, the coral- and kelp-covered reefs off Macauleys, Moonee, Sapphire, Woolgoolga and Red Rock headlands have produced a mixture of Spanish and spotted mackerel. Anglers anchoring up over structure are reaping the rewards on mackerel and tuna on balloon baits and snapper, tuskfish, morwong, samson and pearl perch on deeper set baits.

Anglers fishing wider offshore have reported plenty of 2kg mahi mahi from around trap floats. The run of Coffs marlin has been at its inconsistent best with smaller blacks, stripes and sailfish being found just wide of South Solitary Island and the much bigger blue marlin encountered from the continental shelf and farther east.

With a lot of ground between fish, most anglers are trolling lures for billfish rather than the live slimy mackerel baits which are the more popular and successful method on the concentrated bait grounds off South West Rocks and Port Stephens.

Rock options

On the rocks there have been plenty of options for versatile anglers, with blackfish and jewfish on offer for those looking for a good feed. For those looking for power and speed, northern bluefin tuna, mackerel tuna and Spanish mackerel have been feeding around the washes of the more prominent headlands and breakwalls.

During periods of big swell or heavy rainfall, the entrance to the inner harbour turns on some excellent luderick and mangrove jack action with anglers floating live bait or weed standing shoulder-to-shoulder in search of very different targets.

Land-based game anglers have a difficult choice: Whether to use wire and a double-hook mackerel rig or to go for a tuna rig of 28kg mono trace and a single hook. LBG anglers looking to carry bait onto the rocks should look no further in their search for bait than the fishing platform on the Coffs Jetty. Schoolkids have been making good catches of yellowtail from the wharf with even the odd slimy mackerel making it to the bottom of their buckets.

When catching bait in these local high water temperatures, it pays not to bait up your bait jig – baited hooks seem to encourage the hordes of ravenous butterfish. Waiting it out with unbaited hooks is the way to go when in search of the local yakkas.

On the beaches there have been reports of good jewfish to 14kg coming from the northern beaches of Korora and Sapphire. Beach worms and fresh mullet fillets have been the most successful baits. Lure anglers keen to catch a big jew on a lure should look no further than the rocks at either end of Campbells Beach, to the south of Sapphire. This is an area that has produced many big fish during the Easter mullet run in years gone by. Mullet have already started to congregate in the bays and in the harbour so let’s hope that the pro beach netters aren’t successful in decimating these important stocks during their breeding cycle.

Estuaries impressive

The bass and mangrove jack fishing has been particularly good since I last wrote. With constant rainfall and eased water restrictions, it’s fair to say that the local drought has well and truly broken without the massive fish kills that a huge flood could have caused.

After travelling up the Bellinger River a few nights ago, I was impressed with the water quality and the size of the bass that were actively feeding in the deeper areas where rapids pushed disturbed water against tree-lined banks. Mangrove jack chasers have reported more success on lures in recent times, with all of the recognised creeks from Grafton to Nambucca Heads producing solid jacks from 1kg to 3kg.

Transparencies

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Paul Beaumont’s lovely 25.6kg Spanish mackerel was well worth the effort of the long trip south to Bundagen Headland.

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This bream ate a Jitterbug after dark.

Dave Rae works over a likely-looking snag for jacks in a Coffs Coast creek.

The Atkinson boys fishing for mullet. Kids love catching fish and mullet are a great way to

The author with a popper-munching bass.

Images