The How and When of Catching Barra

Troy Jones | April 2003 • Area Articles / Queensland / Tropical North / Townsville /

SOFT plastics, jig trolling, deepwater jigging and all the new rage lure techniques are just some of the concepts that fishos have been bombarded with lately. Some methods are new and some are old and being reinvented, but all are causing a great deal of confusion in the angling community. In this article, rather than going off into a blow-by-blow account of how each technique works, I'll head back to basics.

A couple of months ago a friend of mine moved up to North Queensland, and he's disappointed that he has yet to land a metre-long barra. He's read all of Rod Harrison's barra articles, watched all of Alex Julius' barra videos, joined a fishing club and fished with some of Townsville's 'barra kings'. He now knows more about barramundi than most anglers, so where has he gone wrong?

To put it simply, he has learnt the 'where' and 'how' of barra fishing but hasn't realised that it can take years to master the knowledge of 'when'. Putting this knowledge into practise is what produces consistent results.

Top guides and master fishos can tell you the 'whens' of barra fishing off the top of their heads like a school kid with the times tables. 'Whens' cover the factors that make you try a twitch when you haven't caught a fish by jerking all day. Every lure can be retrieved in a number of ways so, before changing lures, consider this: have you tried every retrieve that you can think of? Are you using the correct lure for the structure you're working over? Three-foot deep oyster rocks are not the spot to give a 20ft ScaleRaza a whirl!

Top fishermen know that different fish species eat certain baits at different times of the year. Lure fishers need this information to ensure that they make the correct lure choice. If you see bait shoaled up or being attacked, select a lure that best imitates the bait. If prawns are being harassed in a shallow gutter, throw a DOA or a Rio Prawn. If you can see shoaled up herring on a deep snag, try Koolabung Live Baits, Mad Mullets or soft plastic shads. Remember that you won't find good numbers of fish without plenty of bait to hold your prey in the area.

Another thing to bear in mind is retrieve speed. The general rule is that you can never go slow enough, but this doesn't always apply. When barra are hunting in shallow or exposed waters, working lures quickly makes them appear to be trying to escape – and this can make for the perfect temptation.

In all, the most important thing to remember is not to be afraid to try something new. Change lures, adjust your retrieve, and change the angle that you're throwing your lures so that the lure follows a different tack upon retrieval.

Don't think that following this advice will guarantee you a metre-long barra in the next couple of months though. The only way to achieve this is to spend time using and building upon your knowledge. I suggest keeping a record of your success and failures so that you can create a history for a specific area. This will start to show you certain patterns in fish habits – the all-important 'whens'!

And if you want to get more leave passes to go out and fish, I suggest that you go after the kids are in bed, the dishes are done and you've finished any other pre-requested jobs set down by the cheese and kisses. I'm also careful not to wake anyone when I come home and never stay out too late.

RECENT CATCHES

Finally the rains have come – not in the form of a monsoon, but beggars can't be choosers.

As a result of the rain, crabs and prawns have started to appear in abundance. All our common estuaries around Townsville are holding good numbers and consistently producing. Try cast netting around drains, sand and mud drop-offs for prawns. Crabs should be found around the mouths and any sand or mud bars, and I recommend that you try the incoming tide for the best results. If possible, use fresh baits.

For land-based anglers, Ross River, The Strand and Pallarenda have been fishing really well for queenfish and barra. Live herring have been the pick of baits lately, although prawns will always pull a fish of some description as long as the prawn is live, or at least fresh (and preferably local).

Boaties chasing barra will do well fishing Crocodile, Alligator, Burumbush or Morrissy creeks. Salamander Reef consistently produces big queenfish in large numbers at this time of year. The most exciting method to capture for the queenfish is with surface lures. Speed is the key – the faster the better!

1) Steve Mclean with a quality barra. For consistent success, it's important to be flexible when targeting these fish.

2) Mangrove jack are a common bycatch when targeting barra with lures.

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