Six of the best surf rigs
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AT THE Brisbane Boat Show, QFM Editor Stephen Booth and I discussed some of the recent beach fishing articles I’ve had published in this magazine. Stephen mentioned that some of the readers had told him they were keen to read more about beach fishing and in particular, beach rigs. After I did a bit of homework, I was amazed at how little has been written about beach fishing rigs.

Having the right rig for the job is vital in all forms of fishing and surf fishing is no different. The rigs that I have listed here are ones that I have been shown or rigs that I have modified over the years to suit the beach environment. I have illustrated a standard version of the rigs but, depending on the conditions and the terrain that you’re fishing, these rigs will need to be customised to suit your own fishing environment. As a general rule, keep the weight down to what you can manage and opt for a strong leader material such as 40lb Penn 10X before using wire for tailor and flathead.

I have seen some elaborate and well thought out beach rigs over the years, but in this article I’ll stick to the basics and cover most species and the techniques used to target them.

RIG 1 – RUNNING SINKER
There are plenty of great fish to be had right at your feet. For whiting, bream, dart and flathead, a standard running sinker rig, keeping the sinker as light as possible, is ideal. If there are lots of flathead around I run a heaver leader. However, for the general applications a 6kg main line and leader is perfect.

Incorporating a flattened sinker is helpful when the sweep makes it hard to hold the bottom. If you’re using side-cast tackle, a second swivel with the sinker running between the two can make a big difference when it comes to line twist.

RIG 2 – TAILOR
Everyone loves to catch tailor from the beach and for good reason – these fish are available all year round and can grow to well over 5kg.

My rig for tailor doesn’t incorporate any wire; I’d rather live with the odd bite-off than miss some of the big fish that shy right away from wire. However, if you’re not game to fish without wire, add a small trace of light, single gauge, stainless steel wire to the rig.

Another feature of this tailor rig is the double swivel and the very short leader. The double swivel is especially for Alvey users, but due to the spinning motion of a lot of tailor baits, especially pilchards, it’s not such a bad idea to have the extra swivel on all outfits. The reason for the short trace is to allow for a lot more distance in the cast. I find that bulky baits which are pitched into the surf on a long leader will spin with the sinker in the air and create drag that will shorten that cast.

On this rig I’ve also included a swivel between every hook. Tailor are notorious for throwing hooks by jumping and twisting during the fight. If a fish is caught on the last hook of a gang, this twisting motion causes the hook that is locked against the other hooks in the gang to twist out of the fish’s mouth. By adding the swivel, the fish can twist all he likes without pulling the hooks free.

RIG 3 – LIVE BAIT
Live baiting the surf is very popular in the southern states but it’s not very common in Queensland. Big tailor, jew, sharks and flathead are just a few fish that won’t think twice about snatching a livie in the surf.

The rig I use has the sinker above the hook, but many anglers can get more distance out of the casts with the sinker on the bottom of the rig.

I like to have two hooks through the fish to share the load during the cast (a single hook will sometimes tear out of the bait on the cast). The knot for this is a sliding snell on the top hook so that it can be adjusted according to the size of the bait.

RIG 4 – SHARK
Night fishing for sharks in the surf is heaps of fun, and on most open surf beaches there are usually plenty of sharks about. Wire is essential, and when using dead baits I rig with a modified paternoster off a short wire dropper.

The wire must be good quality multi-strand and set up according to the breaking strain of the main line you’re using. If you’re using heavy main line and putting some pressure on the shark, the wire will have to be stronger because the pressure of the wire running across the shark’s teeth will eventually wear through.

RIG 5 – PATERNOSTER
I have not yet used a Paternoster in the surf but I understand exactly why it is so popular with many anglers. Dart and whiting are great on a paternoster and when these fish are on, two fish a cast is the norm. Both dart and whiting are attracted to a struggling fish that’s hooked, and as they come to investigate a second bait will often see those Rex Hunt double hook-ups.

When fishing for whiting and dart, I’d be inclined to use a three-way swivel and tie a single, light leader from the swivel to the hook. If you’re fishing for bigger fish, however, a dropper loop off the main line would be fine.

RIG 6 – SLUG CASTING

Just to make the list complete, I’ll add a slug-casting rig. I like to use a very short, single-strand wire trace with a quality ball bearing swivel to stop line twist. I always make these up myself as the pre-made ones are made with cheap swivels and wire. The huge clips that are used in the pre-made leaders are also too bulky.

1) Big dart are the most common species found along the open surf beach. Paternoster rigs and running sinker rigs are best.

2) A good mixed bag from the beach of South Straddie.

3) The beaches on South Stradbroke Island are filled with fish, but the right rig is necessary to make the most of the fishing.

4) Whiting and flathead are often found together right up against the shore so it pays to run a heavier leader when you’re fishing for whiting.

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