Hastings estuary opportunities

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Port Macquarie has a multitude of fishing possibilities for all types of estuary anglers.

The Hastings River has many fishing options for land-based anglers and those who have boats. A canoe or kayak will also make local fish more accessible, especially in the upper reachers of the Hastings' lower tributaries, the Maria River and Limeburners Creek.

The town centre is just inside the mouth of the river and the Town Green lines this shore, with its main attraction the Lady Nelson Wharf. This strip of river is very popular with anglers targeting, jew, bream, flathead, whiting, tailor, blackfish, pike, garfish and mullet.

The Bend, at the start of the southern breakwall, is a popular place for ripping into Winter blackfish or waiting for a jewie to take a bait at night. These spots are often fished by locals but during the holiday periods, these areas can become congested. The best times for fishing these areas are when the tides and moon are just right.

Other than around the town centre, there are plenty of other possibilities. You can hop in the car and drive to some of the many fishing spots on the river. Some you may have to walk to once you park, while there are many places where you can just lob up with the family in the car and fish by the roadside.

You can put your canoe in somewhere sheltered and paddle to your choice of spots or, if you have your own boat or hire one, the options are endless.

If you are lucky enough to have your own boat you will be able to access many areas that the hire boats can’t go or don’t have the time to get there. There are a few good boat ramps, the best being at Westport Park. I suggest you choose one that allows you to get to the place you want to fish the quickest.

I have found that the best way to fish the Hastings is top make a plan, select a destination and then go straight to it. You can always go somewhere else if Plan A doesn’t come to fruition.

Here are some of the options on the Hastings and its associated tributaries. Some of these areas are accessible by road or foot, so check out a Waterways map or tourist map to see how to get there.

The River Mouth, Coal Wall and Pelican Island

These areas can be targeted from land and boat and are some of the most popular areas on the Hastings. Pick your tides and any number of species may be caught from the breakwalls. The Coal Wall, along the North Shore, is accessible by land by taking the Settlement Point Ferry to the North Shore.

This area is more readily fished by boat and bream, flathead, whiting and blackfish are the favoured targets. Luring for bream is possible here but water conditions need to be right. Flathead can be caught in numbers all year around Pelican Island but the warmer months will see an increase in numbers and activity. Back Creek, behind Pelican Island, is a great place to collect yabbies and poddy mullet for bait and is well worth a throw on the top of the tide.

Limeburners Creek

Limeburners is the home of the Hastings oyster leases and is an ideal place for having a go at bream on soft plastics or hard-bodied lures. With plenty of structure, the bream will hold up around the leases and readily take baits or lures that are presented well.

The man-made structures of Limeburners Creek are complemented with plenty of natural structure. If you spend time navigating this waterway you will see man-made structure and natural structure coming together to form ideal fish habitat.

Limeburners Creek also has some excellent sand banks and weed beds that are great places to have a throw for numerous species. At the end of the leases, the creek meanders its way into some large ponds that hold plenty of natural structure and weed beds – ideal places to lure a nice Flathead.

Settlement Point to Blackman’s Point

This stretch of the Hastings has a variety of fishing options. This area can be accessed by boat or car. On the southern bank of the river you have the Coal Wall along Settlement Point Road, which has plenty of deep holes for fish to lay up in. This is an ideal spot to take the family for a fish.

On the northern side you have the mouth of Limeburners and Big Bay and plenty of muddy mangrove banks. All have suitable spots for fish. Big Bay has a multitude of oyster leases but is very shallow and should only fished be at the top of a tide, and still with caution.
Big Bay is the ideal spot for a canoe or kayak, which will be able to reach places boats can’t get to. The stretch of river from the opening of the canals to Blackmans Point has a host of rock walls, jetties, pontoons and floating oyster leases.

If things have been slow the canals are an option, especially on the top of the tide, when soft plastics can be thrown around the pontoons and boats for bream and flathead. Please remember to respect the property of others and to be courteous to those who live on the canals.

The Maria River

The Maria enters the Hastings at Blackmans Point. At low tide Blackmans Point provides the ideal place to pump yabbies. On the top of the tide the sand flats are covered and create a perfect place to target whiting, flathead and bream. It’s best to target the drop-off into the main channel of the Hastings and the Maria.

Blackmans Point can be popular place and is best targeted early in the morning or late in the day. The Maria River has abandoned oyster leases, sandbanks and weed beds and a multitude of natural structure that will hold fish all year round.

Lemon Tree is a great spot to berley up a variety of fish, from bream to garfish. It is a deep hole a short distance from Blackmans Point on the left-hand bank which is marked by an old lemon tree – hence the name.

Farther up the Maria you will find lots of quiet places to target all estuary species. Mud crabs can also be found up the Maria and it’s well worth dropping a few traps during the warmer months.

Dennis Bridge, Little Rawdon Island

Just west of the Dennis Bridge is a little island surrounded by sandbanks, deep drop-offs and holes. This is an ideal place to target flathead, whiting and the odd bream. Green Point, on the northern bank, has a host of natural structure and is ideal for flathead and bream.

At Green Point, if you follow the river left you will head around the back of Little Rawdon Island. This also has a multitude of natural and man-made structure that holds fish. Once around Little Rawdon Island, you enter Caswell Channel, which runs along the back of Rawdon Island and has some very deep holes. There are also some shallow, rocky bars which must be navigated with caution and the end of the channel is passable only on a high tide.

Between Little Rawdon Island and Rawdon Island are some has some excellent spots for bream and flathead. Estuary perch and bass can be found in this area but are not commonly targeted.

Rawdon Island to Wauchope

This stretch of river is long and winding and has a variety of places to fish. The pick is around Oxley Head and Sandy Point. This area has lots of really good spots to throw a lure for a flathead and good size fish are found here. Bream and whiting also frequent this area and fish are not hard to find if you put in the time.

Wauchope has some great spots to fish for garfish, herring, bream and flathead. Estuary Perch and bass can be found here numbers are low. Fishing for natives farther upstream is better.

These are just a few places to get you started on the Hastings and its associated waterways. I normally fish a certain area and if things aren’t going right, I know that I can move to something else close by. Fishing the Hastings is never boring. There is always something on the bite, all you have to do is find it.

The Hastings River is one of the new recreational fishing areas and is becoming very popular with visiting anglers. Please remember to respect these waters by following all NSW Fisheries and Waterways regulations. Take only what you need and practise catch and release. If we all do this, then we will have a sustainable Recreational Fishing Area that everyone will be able to enjoy.

Facts

Wildlife

Wildlife in the Hastings area is abundant so look out for dolphins, pelicans, sea eagles, kites and ospreys, as well as the kingfishers you will see along the more secluded waterways. Kangaroos and wallabies can also be seen. Look out for the swimming roos up Limeburners Creek – they can give you a real shock when you’re quietly soaking a line. Above all, respect the waterways and leave them as you found them.
**Bait and tackle**

There are numerous bait and tackle stores in town, all of which seem to specialise in some particular area. The guys at Port Macquarie Tackle have a wealth of knowledge and are more than willing to help those keen to fish the Hastings. This shop has the largest range of lures for every thing from bream to marlin and the largest supply of soft plastics on the Mid-North Coast.

Bait is an ever-increasing expense but Port Macquarie has many places to collect fresh bait, whether it be trapping live poddy mullet, pumping yabbies, pulling beachworms, jigging for yakkas or throwing soft plastics around the jetties at night for pike. Fresh bait is always the best but please remember to take only what you need and follow NSW Fisheries guidelines.

**Captions**

1. *The Hastings from the air. Photo supplied by the NSW Department of Land and Water Conservation.*

2. *Port Macquarie canals are always a good option as there is plenty of structure for fish.*

3. *Limeburners Creek oyster leases produced this great bream.*

4. *Paul Burke with a nice flathead that took a 1” Big Bite Triple Tail.*

5. *The Maria River not only has great natural structures and drop-offs, it is also very pretty.*

6. *Pike at night on soft plastics are great fun and a great source of bait.*

**Images**