Macleay recovers

Phil Bennett | April 2009 » Area Articles / New South Wales / Mid North Coast / South West Rocks /

Thankfully, after the pervious flood and subsequent fish kill, the fishing around South West Rocks is showing good signs of recovery.

Offshore, the pelagic species are coming back and the river fish are biting again, so fingers crossed the rain holds off for some time yet.

Those heading offshore over the past few weeks have been pleasantly surprised to see the mackerel return.

Pretty well everyone had considered the mackerel season kaput after the flood, but thankfully spotted and Spanish mackerel have hit the northern reefs again.

As usual, a live slimy mackerel is the gun bait, and particularly the smaller fish. Spotties just love these ‘pencil’ slimies and seldom miss the hooks when they strike.

Bigger slimy mackerel are fine, though the hook-up rate can be a bit average so try to find the smaller class of fish.

Spanish mackerel aren’t so fussy and will hit most baits freely. Tailor, bonito, pike, yellowtail and slimy mackerel are usually taken at will.

Unfortunately, the good country for Spanish isn’t ideal for spotted mackerel, so you’ll have to work out which species you’d prefer to chase.

It can be a tough decision. Do you chase the more prevalent, yet smaller, spotted mackerel, or have a shot at the larger, yet far less abundant Spanish?

If you want spotties, stay out on the reefs in 25m to 40m. For Spanish, move inside 20m and hunt around.

Those heading just off Trial Bay Jail have encountered a few cobia again. Last month’s filthy water pushed them miles away but as it cleared they made a welcomed return.

There have been some good fish caught, too, with some up around 25kg landed. Slow-trolling and dropping live baits deep at anchor have both produced fish. Again, live slimy mackerel are proving most reliable.

Some reasonable kingfish are at Fish Rock and Black Rock has produced some good snapper for those fishing early and late.

MACLEY RECOVERS

The poor old Macleay River got belted big-time last month with the flood but I’m pleased to report she’s off life support and now up and running – although quite gingerly.

Once the killer floodgates stopped seeping their poison, the surviving fish began slowly making their way up-river again.

Those closest to the mouth fired up first and, as the weeks slipped by, those in the mid sections of the river began to feed again.

While the river certainly isn’t firing, there’s enough action to make launching the boat worthwhile.

It will take a long time for the water to finally clear properly, and even longer for fish stocks get back to what they were before the fish kill.

Despite the senseless abuse, the Macleay River will survive but due to these stupid floodgates she will never be able to reach her true potential.

There’s been a pretty good run of flathead in the lower reaches, with plenty of fish from 1kg to 1.5kg. A few bigger fish are poking around, though as the water begins to cool you can expect them to shut up shop a little.

Bream numbers aren’t too bad, especially up above Jerseyville.

I’ve had some good spinning sessions lately and found some big bream along the deeper walls and some quality fish up on the flats around dawn and dusk.

The water hasn’t been very clean and still has a touch of that horrible black floodgate look, but it seems only on the surface as the fish are biting quite well.

It was pleasing to see most of the fish I caught were not covered in those terrible red spot disease ulcers usually linked with the opening of
the flood gates.

**JEWFISH MYSTERY**

Jewfish are still a mystery. Another few failed attempts make me wonder what's really going on.

I know fairly recently one shameless local netter illegally set an 8" gillnet along the North Wall close to the mouth. Over two nights he wiped out well over a 100 jewfish, most from 8kg to 17kg.

This sort of insanity has to be stopped and one of the best ways to curtail this decimation is by employing a resident fishing inspector.

Despite its recognition as a terrific fishing location and with a local population of over 6000 which more than trebles in holiday season, we still have no local inspectors.

It's crazy having to wait for someone to head up from Port Macquarie, an hour's drive away if you see or hear of such illegal activity.

We need a permanent fisheries inspector now!

Those avoiding the black water and heading up into the fresh have had fun catching quality bass from Kempsey bridge and well up-river.

The water is clean and sweet, a welcome change from the black poison we've been dealing with for the past six weeks.

**Images**

Some nice flathead are being caught in the lower reaches. This 3kg Macleay fish took a Squidgy Flick Bait cast around Kemps Corner.

Bream numbers are quite good, though you may have to head up river a little to find them.
Mulloway numbers usually improve as we head into Winter, though recent illegal netting activities certainly aren't helping.