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Angler: Aidan Robertson
Species: 81cm Sandy Straits Flathead
Lure: ZMan 5" StreakZ in Pearl
Jighead: TT Lures 1/6oz HeadlockZ HD



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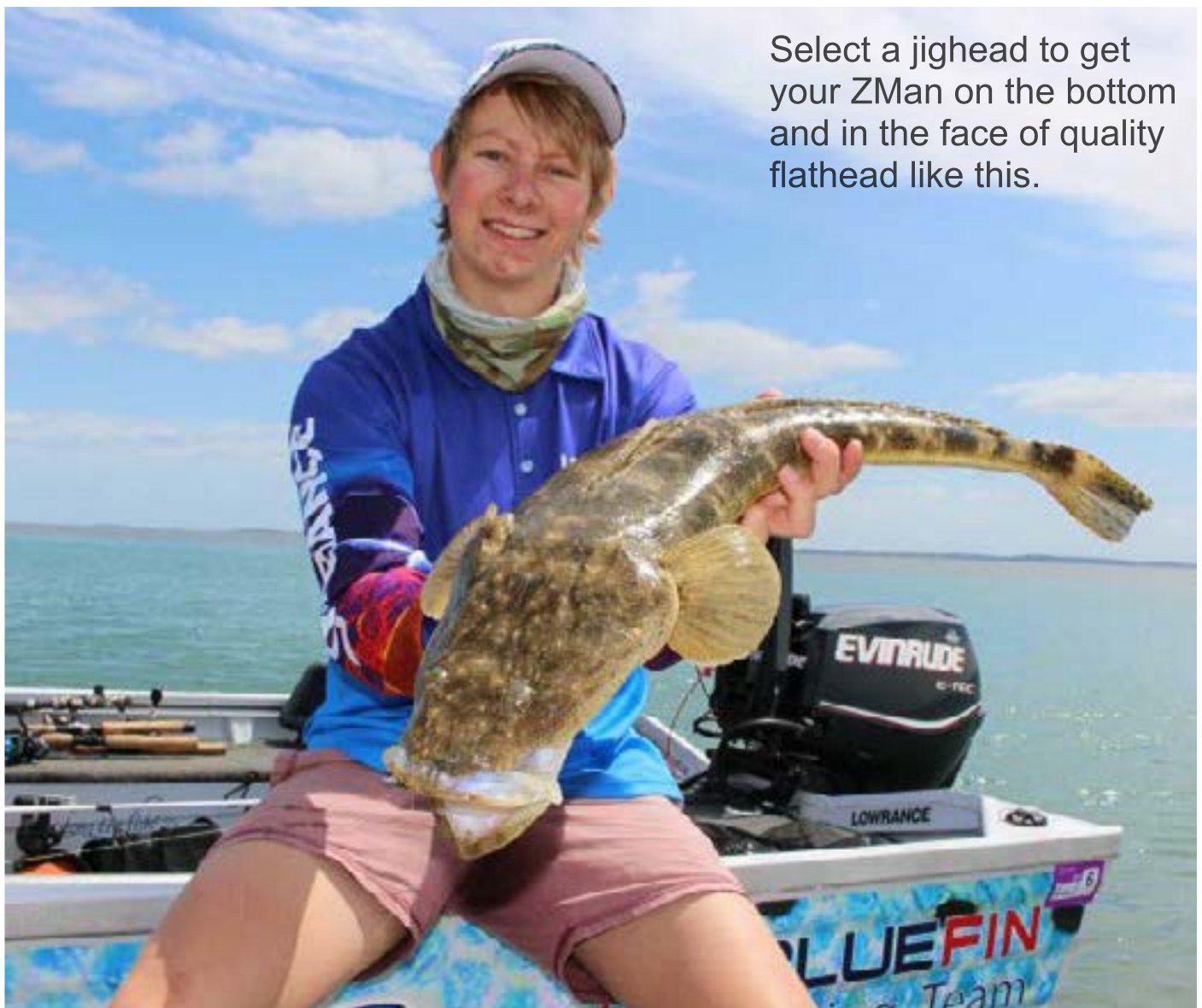
Winter Flathead



By Aidan Robertson

With winter just around the corner it's time to gear up for flathead. Dusky Flathead (*Platycephalus fuscus*) are found in abundance in the winter months. With this said, it is a great time of year to bring out the flathead gear and chase a few on plastics. If you are new to lure fishing then this is the species for you. Flathead generally aren't fussy about what they feed on and as long as you present the lure in the correct manor you're in with a chance.

When winter approaches flathead seem to come into the general areas that I fish and are a common catch. They sit in tight to the bottom and ambush their prey as it approaches overhead. Knowing this, I generally fish a TT Lures HeadlockZ HD jighead between 1/8 and 1/4oz in weight, depending on the depth of the water. By using a jighead within this weight range your plastic spends most of its time making constant contact with the bottom and staying right in the strike zone.

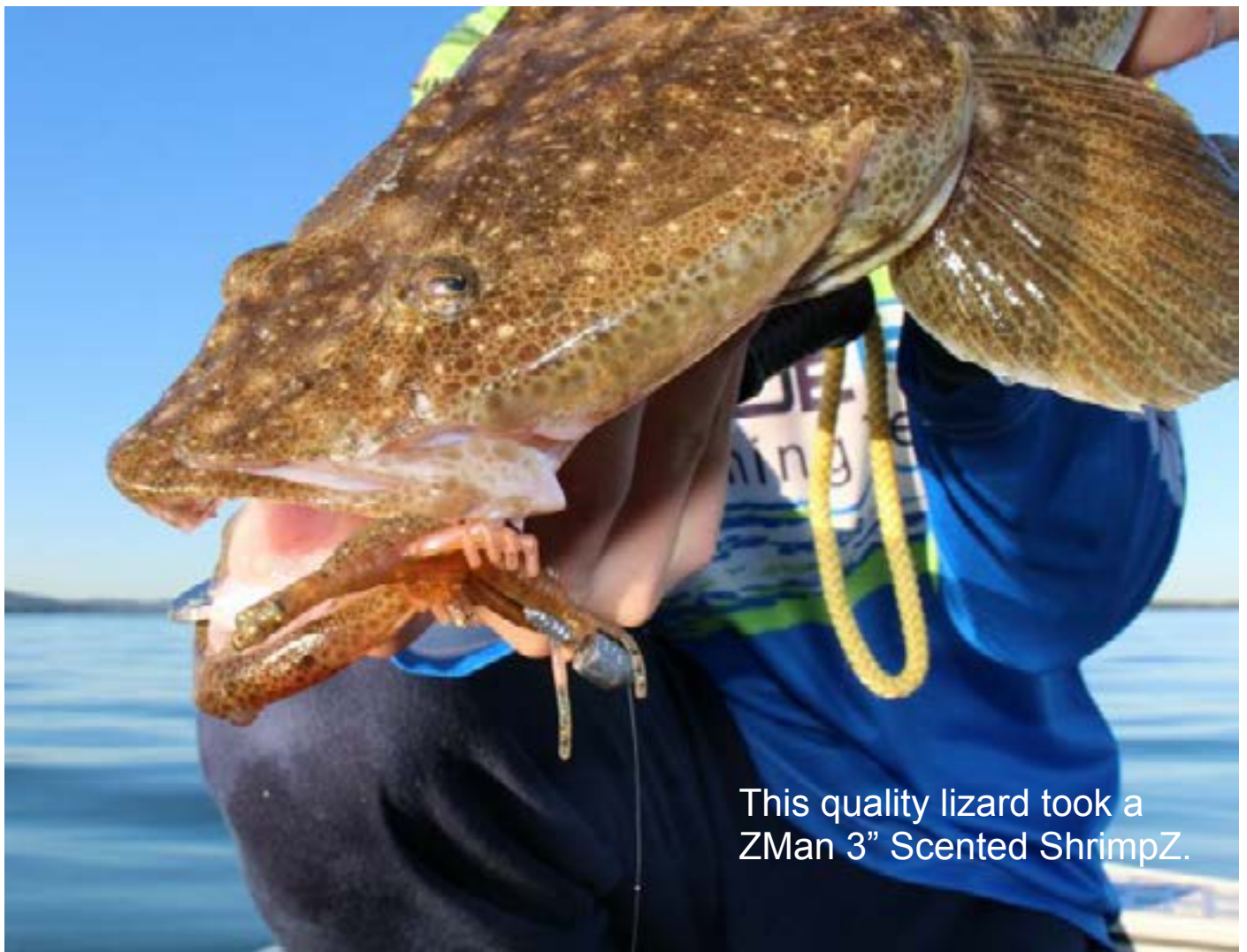


Select a jighead to get your ZMan on the bottom and in the face of quality flathead like this.

No matter if you have a boat, kayak or are limited to land based fishing, I'm sure that there are a couple of areas near you that hold a few flathead. In my general area we have a good variety of saltwater lakes, rock walls, sand banks and flats that are all good holding areas for flathead. The best advice when fishing any sort of lure is to try and 'match the hatch' as best you can. Different colours and styles of plastics will work well in different locations but the most versatile for all locations would have to be the ZMan 3" Scented ShrimpZ, 4" StreakZ Curly TailZ and the smaller ZMan 2.5" GrubZ. With these three styles you will be covered.

For the bigger flathead it may also be handy to have a couple of ZMan 5" StreakZ in Pearl colour rigged up. The bigger plastics I have found to be effective when fishing deeper water with a bit more tidal flow. These areas, such as rock walls and drop offs, tend to hold some large fish. On a recent trip targeting threadfin salmon on my local rock wall I encountered an 81cm flathead on my third cast. This fish was caught on a 5" StreakZ in Pearl, rigged on a 1/4oz 5/0 TT HeadlockZ jighead. This just goes to show that it's sometimes worth throwing a larger lure to see if there are bigger females about. Don't be afraid that you won't catch smaller flathead with a 5" plastic because although small they are very greedy and on numerous trips I've caught flathead only just bigger than the lure they tried to fit down their mouth.





This quality lizard took a ZMan 3" Scented ShrimpZ.

When fishing clear water for flathead, such as shallow rock bars, sand banks and flats, Motor Oil and Watermelon Red are very effective colours. We all have our personal favourites or 'go to' lure colours out of the ZMan range and mine would without doubt be Motor Oil. When the water is a little dirtier I have found the New Penny colour in the ZMan 4" StreakZ Curly TailZ and 3" Scented ShrimpZ to work very well.

My preferred technique for about 90 percent of lure fishing would be to let the plastic hit the bottom and then give the lure two short sharp flicks of the rod, followed by a pause until you see the line go slack. Once your line has gone slack you know that your plastic has made contact with the bottom and I then repeat the process.

When fishing rock bars you have to be a little bit more careful and give the lure a flick as soon as it makes contact with the bottom to minimize your risk of getting snagged. If you do happen to get snagged and are in a boat or kayak it's not usually a problem. By not putting too much tension on the line, you can usually motor/paddle to your lure and once you get behind it, it will usually just pull off with a little flick.

What tides should you fish for flathead?

A run out tide is usually a good time to fish for flathead. During the run out tide the water drains off the flats, giving flathead an opportunity to sit in areas where there is tidal movement, for example drop offs or amongst rocky outcrops. Here they can sit in ambush and wait for the

perfect size meal to make its way off the flats and into their mouth. In an area like this you can position your boat or kayak adjacent to the drop off and let your lure flow down with the current and through the strike zone.



Rock walls can be very productive.

Another stage of the tide that I like to fish is the first hour or so of the run in. At this time water is covering the flats and small baitfish are the first ones to make their way up into the shallow water to feed on yabbies and crabs that have been walking the flats at low tide. At certain areas in the estuary system predatory fish are not far behind, sneaking their way up onto the flats for an easy meal. At this stage in the tide flathead are not all that you might encounter. Through the winter months grunter, bream and tailor are all present around rock bars, shallow flats and weed beds, making for some fun by-catch.



Sand flats and the mouths of drains are prime locations for flathead.

The gear that I use for chasing flathead is a size 10/15 size Quantum Exo/Smoke spin reel and a 1-4/2-5kg 7" graphite spin rod. A 7" rod allows for you to throw a nice long cast with even the lightest of lures. I usually use between 4 and 10lb braid on my flathead set ups, with 10-15lb Fluorocarbon Leader. Fluorocarbon leader is a must because flathead have abrasive mouths and can fray up your leader quite easily when they are trying to shake the hook throughout the fight.

So if you're looking at getting into lure fishing or just looking for something to fish for over winter, I recommend you get yourself a couple of packets of ZMan plastics and give chasing flathead a go. Whether you are young or old, have years of experience or are just starting out, they are loads of fun!

Until next adventure,
keep your rod bent!
Aidan Robertson



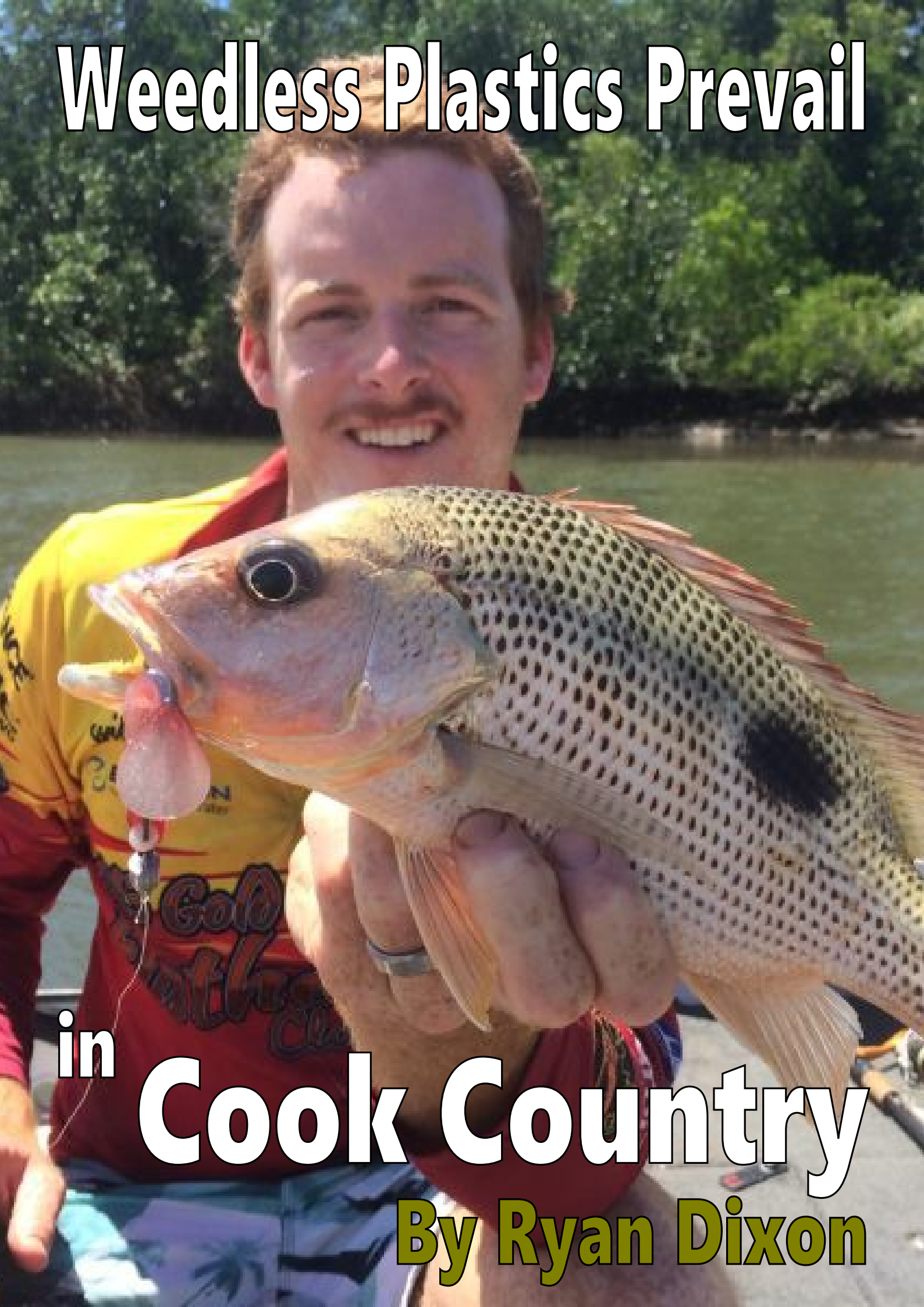
Aidan releases a big girl after a quick photo.

Weedless Plastics Prevail

in

Cook Country

By Ryan Dixon



Recently I was lucky enough to escape the hustle and bustle for three weeks and embark on a fishing adventure to far north Queensland. After being spoilt with unbelievable shallow reef fishing, covered in a previous article titled 'PaddlerZ Shine on Batt Reef', it was time to focus on fishing the estuaries and freshwater creeks that are situated around Cooktown.

Although the weather whilst we were in Cooktown wasn't favourable, we had plenty of fishing options, with two main rivers at our disposal and a one hour drive south to the Bloomfield River, situated at the Aboriginal community of Wujal Wujal.

Both the Endeavour and Anan Rivers are situated in Cooktown and offer excellent lure fishing for barramundi, mangrove jack and fingermark in the saltwater reaches, and jungle perch, sooty grunter and mangrove jack in the fresh. After a quick debrief on the rivers with the local tackle shop owner, we had a brief walk along the wharf where the local indigenous folk were catching metre long barramundi on hand lines. This made us as eager as ever to get on the water, with the Endeavour River being our first river to target.

Jacks were to be a target on this adventure.





Ryan with a nice
fingermark on a
ZMan 4" SwimmerZ.

Being such a big river, we started at the mouth and travelled many kilometres upstream in search of likely looking snags that we could cast our weedless soft plastic presentations into. We found it rather easy, locating plenty of good looking snags and with expectations very high after the sight of metre long barramundi being caught on hand lines, we didn't need much convincing to drop the electric motor into the water and start fishing. We found the fishing rather tough early on in the session but as the tide dropped out of the flooded mangrove banks the fish started becoming more active and we boated enough fish to keep us interested for the following day's fishing.

Day two in Cooktown saw us launch our boat into the Anan River, which was by far one of the best looking rivers I have fished. Rock bars, deep snags, shallow flats with gin clear water and easy access into the freshwater reaches, where the mangroves gave way to a rainforest style backdrop. Mangrove jack were a common sight in the freshwater, along with small barramundi, archer fish, tarpon and a number of different types of trevally.

The fishing in the Anan River was far more impressive than the Endeavour River, with healthy sized fingermark, mangrove jack, queenfish and barramundi all finding our weedless rigged plastics inviting. We found the best tide was the last of the run out and most of the fish were caught whilst holding in deep snags that we located using our sounder.

The presentation that I found most successful was using a TT Lures 1/4oz 4/0 Snake Head jighead, rigged with a ZMan 4" Swimmerz and locked in place with a Big Game Bait Button to stop the plastic sliding off the Snake Head. I would make a long cast, up current past the snag by at least 3-4 metres and retrieve the lure with the current through the snag at quite a rapid speed. By retrieving at a faster pace I believe the fish makes a spur of the moment decision to eat the lure and boy did they smash it!

Using a weedless rigged soft plastic was imperative for the type of structure we were fishing, as traditional style jigheads were finding themselves buried into the timber snags more often than not. ZMan 3" MinnowZ were just as effective as the SwimmerZ and again were fished weedless. These were rigged on a TT Lures ChinlockZ jighead, with a small ball sinker tied to the front with a simple loop knot.

A brilliant days fishing was had on the Anan River and with a few beers whilst eating the fruits of the ocean, including mud crabs that were caught that day, life couldn't get much better.





Ryan's with a big JP.

The next day saw us taking a different approach as we left the boat at the caravan park and decided to go on foot in search of some jungle perch, in the small freshwater streams that were situated on the outskirts of Cooktown. Filling a backpack each with a selection of lures and food for the day, we didn't

have to travel too far until we found likely looking jungle perch country. Although our experiences of catching jungle perch were limited, we didn't find it too hard, and with two trophy sized fish caught we were more than satisfied. With the added bonus of sooty grunter thrown in for good measure, a good day's fishing was had by all.

The following days in Cooktown saw us fishing both rivers again and also heading south to the Bloomfield River. The Bloomfield River almost looked untouched, with little to no lure fishing pressure. Whilst fishing there we witnessed the locals spear fishing as they stood on the front of their small boats, looking for any type of marine life that they could take back for their food. It truly was an unbelievable experience, witnessing the locals catching fish the way they have been for hundreds of years.



Ben with a quality JP from a picturesque location.



The barra weren't plentiful but they did put smiles on faces when they came aboard.

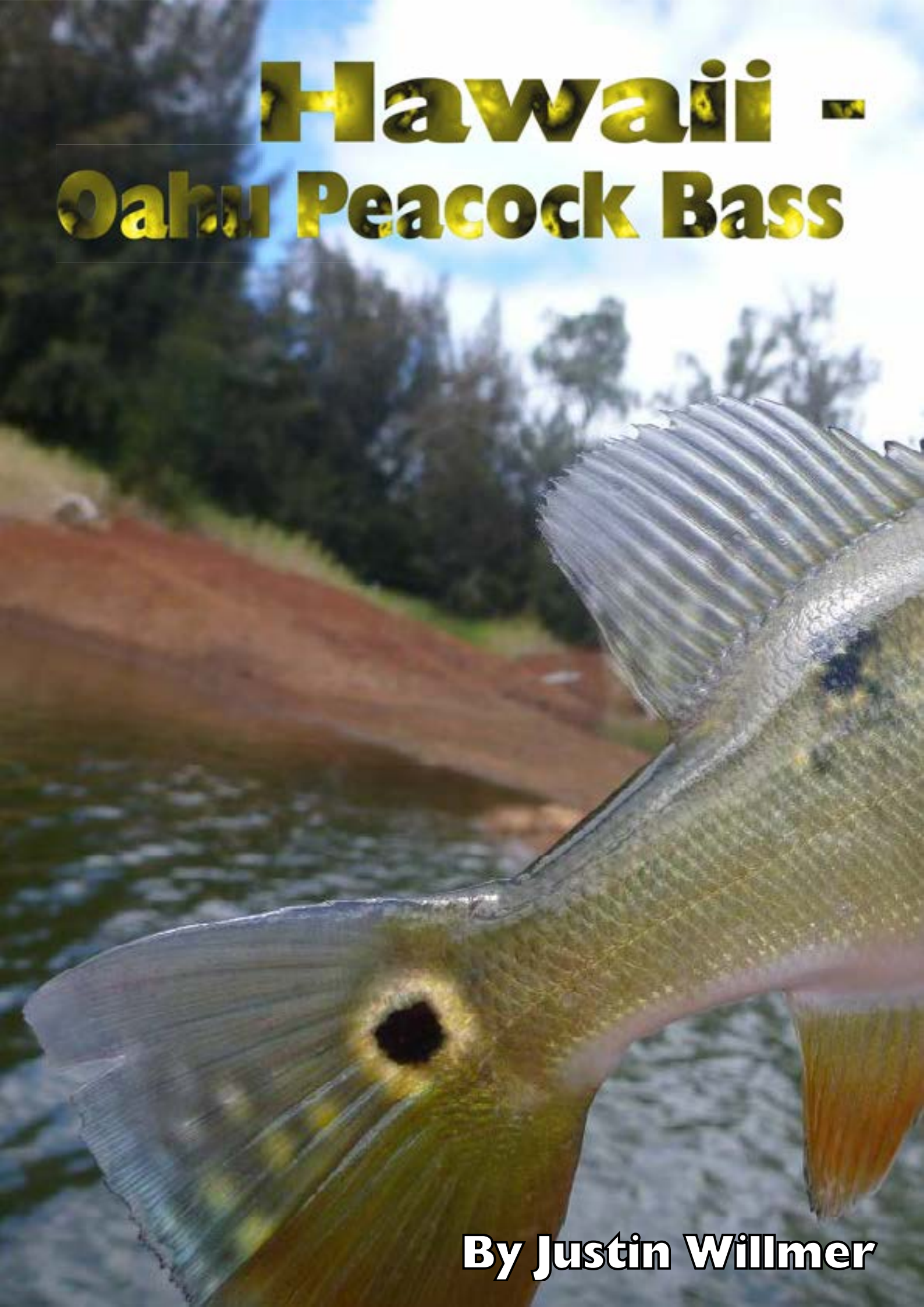
Mangrove jack and trevally were common catches for us in the Bloomfield with barramundi a rare but rewarding catch. Extremely large crocodiles were abundant in the river, which kept us on our toes at all times. You can't possibly drive back to Cooktown without stopping in at the historical Lion's Den Hotel for a cheeky beer and homemade pizza. A brilliant reward for a hard day's fishing.

Cooktown truly is a remarkable town, with plenty of fishing options to suit all types of fishing. Although the weather wasn't kind to us while we were there, we found more than enough water out of the wind and were only left to wonder what the offshore fishing would have had in store for us. Hopefully one day I can return, as I believe there is plenty more exploring to be done in and around this historical part of the world. One thing for sure is that when I do return I will have a large supply of ZMan soft plastics rigged on weedless jigheads.



Ben with a barramundi.

Hawaii - Oahu Peacock Bass



By Justin Willmer

When my wife and I sat down to plan our first overseas holiday together there was no doubt that fishing of some sort would be involved. We were heading to the Hawaiian island of Oahu and after some research we discovered that Lake Wilson (Wahiawa) had a population of peacock bass! On top of this there was also the chance of encountering largemouth bass, red devil, bluegill and a few other species that we hadn't targeted previously. This aligned perfectly with my new year's resolution of catching three new species this year.

To keep things simple and make the most of our short stay and one off opportunity to fish, we booked a day on the water with Hawaii Bass Fishing who offer guided fishing at a reasonable price in both the fresh and saltwater. All that was left to do was to sort a few travel rods and a selection of lures that we thought would do the job. The guys from Hawaii Bass Fishing emailed us through driving directions to the lake, the names of a couple of local tackle stores and a phone contact, to give them a call once at our hotel to address any last minute questions.

We met our guide for the day Frank at the ramp and he soon had the Bass Tracker in the water. Sheri and I were both pumped to make a cast into some new water. We were fishing Shimano three piece travel rods that fit nicely into a homemade rod tube inside our suitcase, with 1000 and 2500 Stradic reels, loaded with 4-6lb braid and a rod length of 8lb fluorocarbon leader. Gear used to target bream in Australia.

All smiles after a fun wedding anniversary spent on the water.



Frank said they had been catching fish recently on small, white, soft plastic worms, rigged weedless on a small worm hook and walked fast across the surface. I opted for a small paddle tail, in the form of a ZMan 2.5" Slim SwimZ in Blue Glimmer colour, rigged on TT Lures HeadlockZ Finesse jigheads in 1/12oz 1/0. Frank was happy to let us give this a go first, but reinforced that we were making the common mistake that most people make when fishing for peacock bass – too heavy and too slow. The lure needed to be buzzed across the surface in a similar fashion to froggin' the surface for barramundi. Secretly I was hoping to hedge my bets and have a chance at a mixed bag of species.

Sheri was first to hook up, fishing her ZMan down a drop off and after a short fight Frank slid the net under a largemouth bass. I think I was even more stoked than her. Big smiles, a few photos, a quick inspection of that massive mouth and the fish was released. I noticed a few red devils milling around the edge of a bank and flicked my lure in just to their right. Frank mentioned that they are not renowned as a lure taker, so I allowed the lure to sink a little, moved it slowly toward them and then paused it again. This attracted the attention of all three fish and I guess their competitive nature took over because they moved in on the lure, I saw the take and set the hook. Fish on!



Sheri with her first largemouth bass on a ZMan 2.5" Slim SwimZ.

Justin was keen to catch a red devil just to check them out.



The red devil gave a good account of itself and there was a fist pump when it was in the net as I had seen pictures of this species and wanted to hold one in my hands. It was also one down on my three new species for the year.

Sheri switched to the unweighted rig in an attempt to stir up a peacock bass, while I went with

a 1/8oz TT HeadlockZ Finesse jighead and ZMan 2.5" GrubZ in Gudgeon colour as I still had her largemouth bass on my mind. Boof! A peacock bass blew up on her lure and soon after another... I was getting tempted to change when a subtle take resulted in a hook set and I soon had my largemouth in the net. After watching the US bass tournaments, visiting ICAST in Vegas for work and dreaming about getting back over there one day to try my luck on this species, I was stoked. I spent a few seconds admiring the fish, grabbed a couple of photos and then immediately changed over to the surface rig and started buzzing the little ZMan 2.5" Slim SwimZ across the surface.

Not a monster but any first of a species is worth celebrating.



We attracted a few more boofs and witnessed peacock bass tearing out from under logs and against the bank to smash the lure. I don't know enough about the species and it may have been the time of year, with fish in pre-spawn mode, as the hits were aggressive 'get out of my territory' hits that didn't seem to be about eating the lure. I finally managed to hook a small peacock and I had knocked off my three new species for the year in one morning!

We had a break for lunch and then refocused on the job at hand. I really wanted Sheri to land her first peacock bass and she deserved it after casting hard and casting well all morning. After a few more blow ups I hooked up again and wrestled a slightly larger peacock bass away from structure. I took a little more time to check out the colours and anatomy of the fish this time before getting it safely back in the water and on its way back into the snags. We were treated to a few more blow ups before another peacock bass ate my Slim SwimZ and I was soon releasing my third.

The clock was ticking and Sheri kept casting... it was just a matter of time. Her cast landed perfectly between two sections of lay down timber and Frank and I both commented that it was a nice cast and deserved a fish. As if it was scripted, a peacock bass rose behind the lure and began tracking the lure across the surface. It's amazing how far a peacock bass will follow the lure before striking and this one was pushing a bow wave ahead of it. This seemed to go on for ages, as all three of us held our breath and waited in anticipation. I think I may have whispered 'eat it' a few times and then BOOF!

New species number three and Justin is pretty stoked.



A hole appeared in the water where the lure was tracking across the surface and there was a split second before the rod buckled over and Sheri was on! This was a larger fish and Sheri handled the rod well, worked the fish back away from the structure and was all smiles once it was in the net. What a way to wrap up a fantastic day on the water. Three new species for me and a couple for Sheri, a day on the water for our wedding anniversary and Frank was good company, sharing loads of information about Hawaii, locations worth checking out and ensuring we had an enjoyable day on the water.

If you are planning a trip away, in Australia or overseas, why not check out the fishing options available locally and check out the local charters so that you can make the most of the window of time you have available. If you find yourself in Hawaii and want to wet a line in the fresh or salt, check out www.hawaiibassfishing.com.

See you on the water...
Justin



The icing on the cake,
Sheri with her peacock.



KEEPING it FRESH



BY Jay NOBLE



Spinnerbaits are ideal for prospecting the timber.

Recently one of my best mates showed a keen interest in getting into some kayak fishing and chasing Australian bass in particular. So naturally I was very keen to get out there with him as soon as possible to start enjoying some great times in our beautiful local area.

With both of us living and working on the Gold Coast we are lucky in the fact that we have good access to some quality dams and rivers in south east Queensland that are not too far from home. So that's where I decided to take Harley as soon as he picked up his new kayak.

We have been fishing a local dam and doing fairly well using some basic techniques and changing up the lure colours and styles that we have been fishing. These changes have been made based on the ever-changing water levels and weather conditions of the dam.

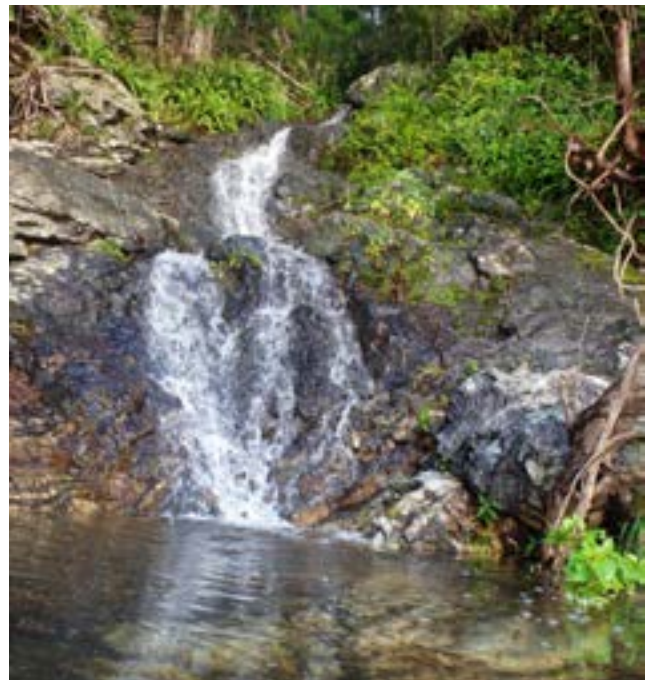


Over the last six months it has been as wet as I can remember, with days and weeks of rain falling in the catchment area. This has resulted in tough conditions, with the fish being harder to locate as the dam's surface area grew larger and all of the structure you were fishing on your last trip now metres underwater.

The areas that have been most productive for us have been the timbered sections and points, as well as the grassed banks that are now submerged in the water. With Harley being new to the fishing game I have been showing him some of my favourite lures that have worked for me in the past.

First up in the morning we have been fishing surface to try and get some solid fish on the ZMan 4" Hard Leg FrogZ. We fish them amongst the thick timber and buzzing them along the surface has been an exciting way to target these aggressive fish.

With the rise in water level, casting them deep up into the grass and working them out onto the edge of the grassy banks has also been really effective. This technique has been working really well right after a fresh downpour of rain as the fish have been moving up on the fresh grass to feed on any frogs or insects in the area. White or Watermelon Chartreuse FrogZ have been doing the job for us, rigged on a TT Lures ChinlockZ SWS jighead in 1/8oz 4/0.



ZMan FrogZ are dynamite on the surface during low light.





As soon as the sun hits the water, that's when we have been trying a few different lure styles and colours to get the bites. Once again, with the rise in water level all of the trees that were on the edge are now underwater, with just the very top branches sticking out. This has been both good and bad at once. Rigging TT Lures Vortex and Striker spinnerbaits, along with plastics fitted with TT Lures Jig Spinners, is a choice that has been paying off as we fish them through the trees fairly easily without snagging up.

With this sort of structure around it makes for very exciting fishing. Getting these lures as tight as possible in and around the trees, with tight drag settings and giving them nothing is definitely an exciting way to spend the morning.

The range of plastics that we have been using include the ZMan 3.5" GrubZ, 4" StreakZ Curly TailZ, 3" MinnowZ, 2.5" Slim SwimZ and the 2.5" GrubZ in a range of colours. The ZMan 3" MinnowZ is a favourite, attached to a #3 Gold Colorado Jig Spinner, running a TT Lures HeadlockZ HD jighead in 1/8oz – 3/8oz with a 3/0 hook. A variety of colours have been working but the stand out colours have been Bad Shad, Motor Oil, Mood Ring, Houdini and Space Guppy to name a few.



The bites on the TT Lures Striker and Vortex spinnerbaits have been really good as well. Casting these right up in the structure and slow rolling them out or hopping them through the timber has been a go-to weapon when the fishing is tough.

The slimmer profile of the Vortex seems to work well when the fish are a little quiet. When they're on and feeding aggressively the larger profile of the Striker spinnerbait is no problem, with fish even swallowing the entire lure right up to the front wire. The extra flash and vibration of these lures really seems to get the bass excited.

TT Spinnerbaits have been deadly fished through the flooded grass and timber.





Key sizes and colours in the spinnerbaits have been the 1/4oz through to 1/2oz in both varieties. Purple Nightmare, Purple Blue Scale, Fire Tiger and Gold / Pumpkin & Olive Scale have been doing the job. Both of these lure choices have served us well, and most importantly are great fish catchers and fairly snagless in the type of country we have been fishing.

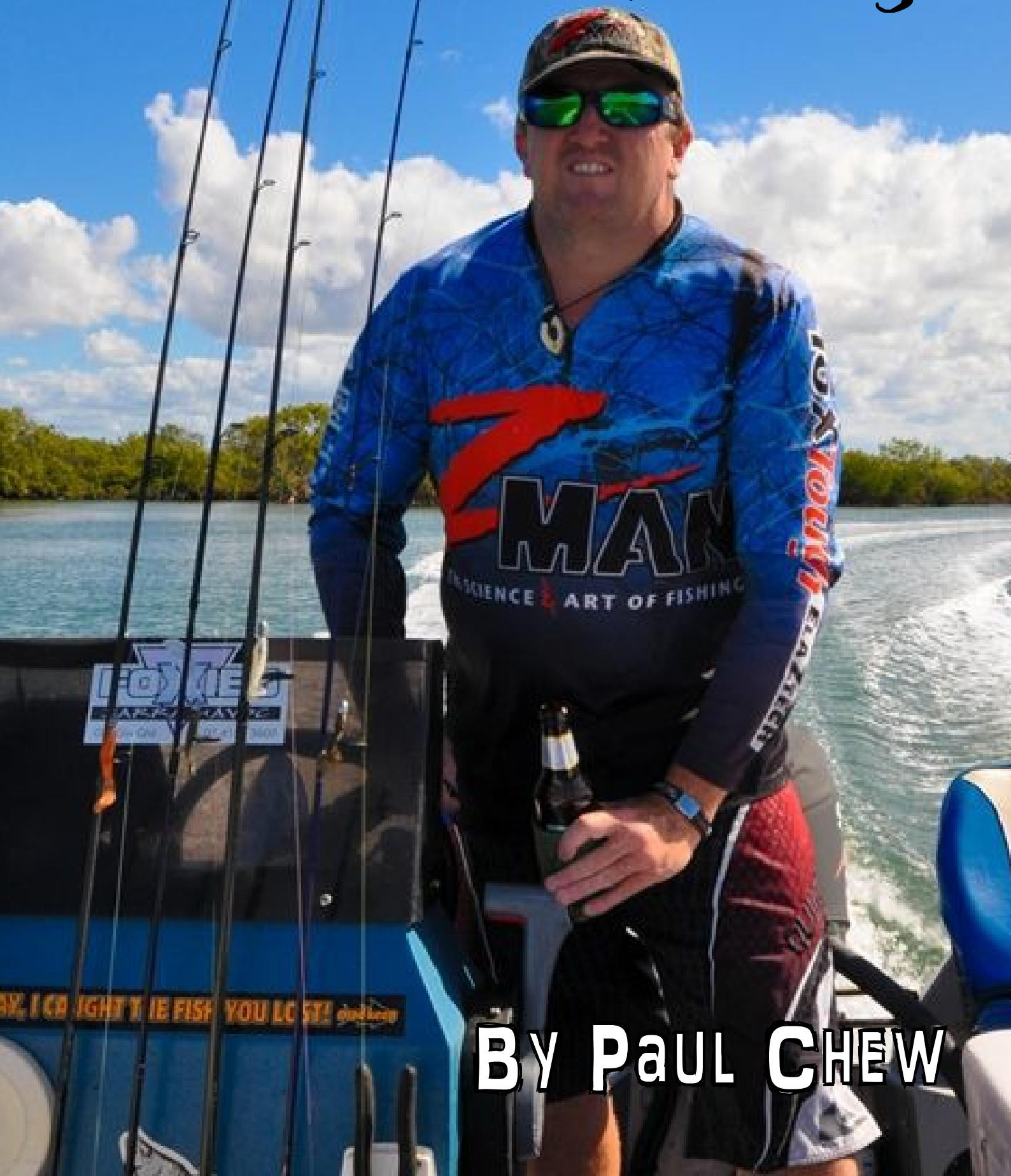


These are just a few of the things that have been working for myself and a mate over the last few months. It's great just to get away from the pressures of work, venture into a great piece of our country and enjoy some quiet time doing what you love. Cheers, Jay....



SOLO SESSIONS

Winter Wanderings



BY PAUL CHEW

With the first wisp of high winter cloud in the air, and no plans or decky available, I pushed the Poly into the calm waters of the Mary River, fired up Suzuki and headed out into the Great Sandy Straights, intent on doing battle with some early season cool water species.

The Lowrance showed that the water temp had dropped dramatically, only 23.7 Degrees, so I decided to fish a little deeper and slower as a starting point. Using only light gear, 6lb braid and 10lb fc leader, with the ever reliable ZMan 2.5" GrubZ chosen as the first cab off the rank and a bit of Pro-Cure Garlic Plus Super Gel Scent completing the deal.

With little run in the tide the deep water was proving pretty barren of any baitfish, so after a bit of a snack, I decided to start working the drain drop-offs up towards the top of the creek. The action started warming up, with a few small trevally breaking up the boredom. Then, as the tide rose, a few small threadfin salmon started herding the small jelly prawn along the mud. I cast the Watermelon Red 2.5" ZMan out, hopping it off the edge of the drain with a couple of high lifts of the rod, then drop as the lure plummets into the creek bed proper.



Paul with a nice thready that was herding bait along a mud edge.

ZMan 2.5" GrubZ & 4" StreakZ
Curly TailZ are thready favourites.



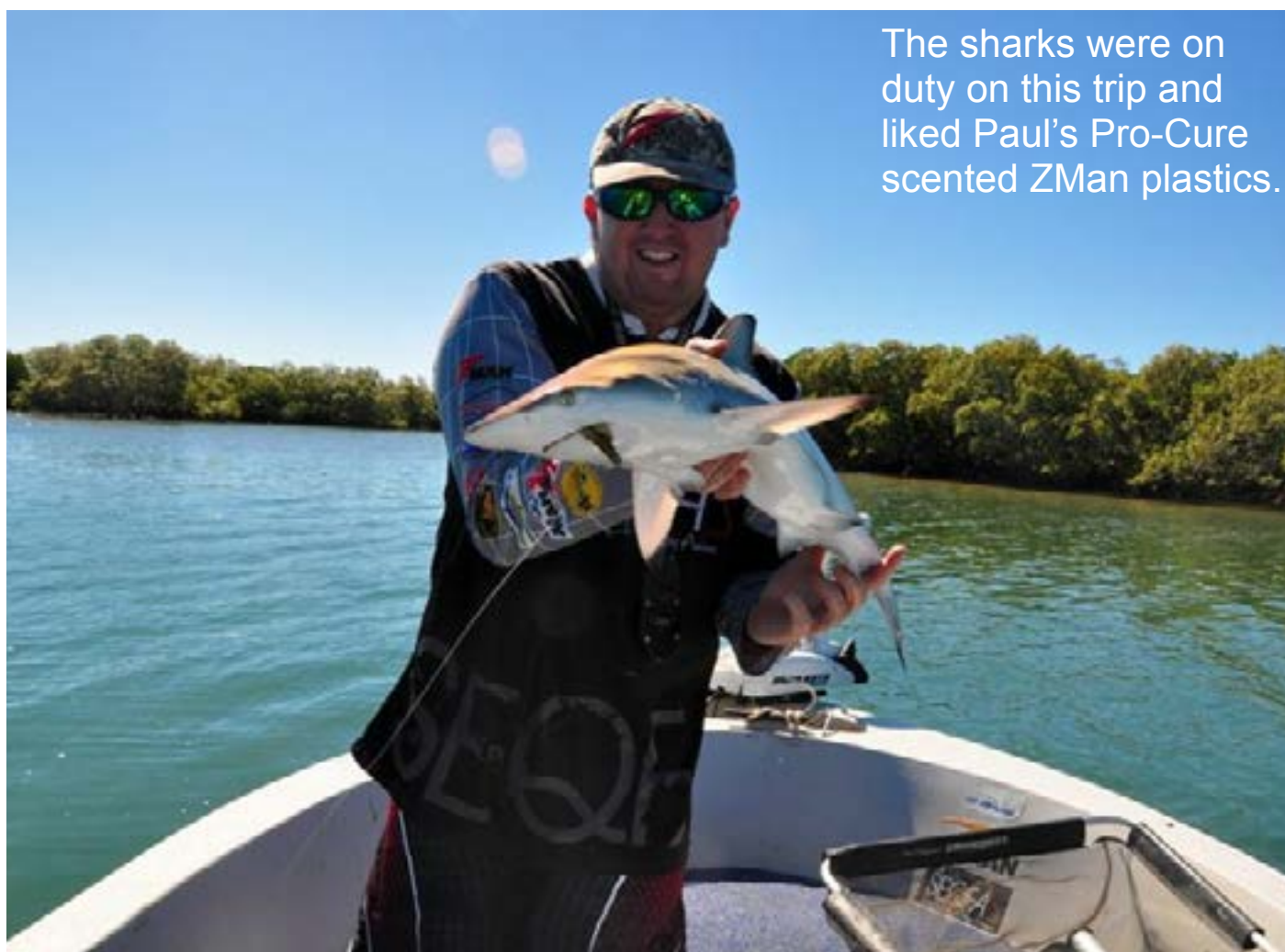
As is the case most of the time, the plastic was inhaled on the drop, with the tell-tale thump and stop of a little thready. A few dull winds on the reel handle, then chaos as the little fish realises the error of its way and lights up the afterburners into the shallow water to try and escape. One of the biggest benefits of fishing the low rising tide is that these denizens of the deep can't disappear at a rate of knots, up through the flooded mangrove forests leaving a trail of destruction in their wake. A few more blistering runs, with the little spin reel screaming and the fish was in the net. I love this style of fishing, it's easy, not requiring lots of technique and normally quite productive.

As far as technique goes, it's as simple as positioning the boat to drift around fifteen metres off the bank, making big long casts at 45 degrees upstream and letting the plastic free fall to the bottom, before commencing a slow hop back to the boat. As mentioned earlier, nearly all bites will come on the drop, apart from the odd blue salmon that will rocket after a plastic that is being burned back in.



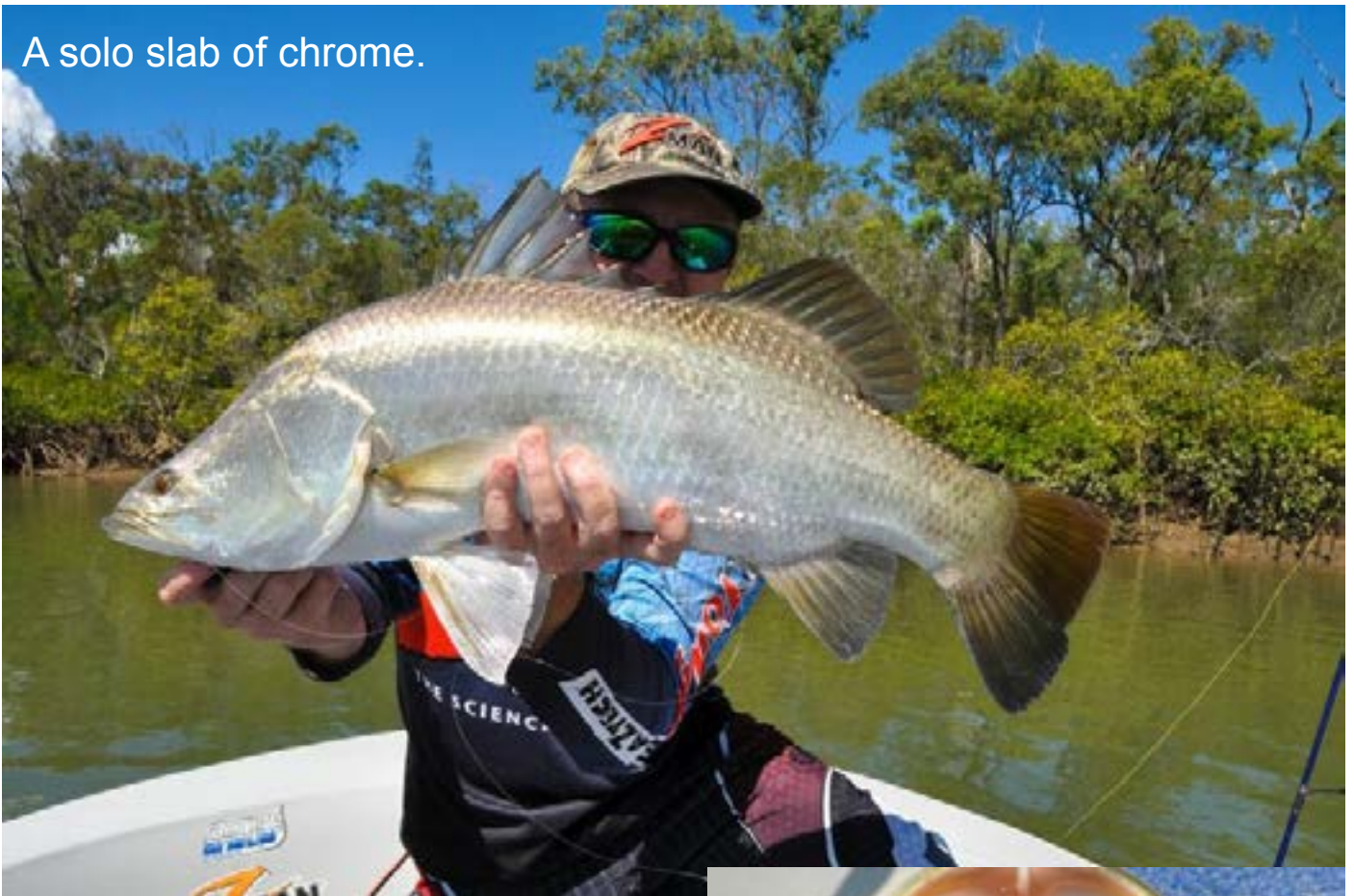
Something I will touch on as part of the Solo Sessions breakdown is netting of fish solo and the importance of taking your time. I have the largest size Environet, which while giving a fair size target, is practically impossible to move through the water. This means the only option is to sit the net half in the water and attempt to swim the fish in. Timing is paramount, as when the fish's head pops out of the water a quick wind and drop of the rod results in you having a chance at controlling where the fish swims. Too much line and it will swim away from the net, too little and it won't have enough freedom to get there. If it lunges, pull the net out and have another go, as swiping at the target will certainly result in many lost fish.

Once the tide started running a bit harder I saw some fish deeper, cast the lure in that direction and immediately the braid moved so I struck. Nothing... it was shredded. I grabbed another rod and launched out a ZMan 4" StreakZ Curly TailZ, which got hit hard again, rod loading up fast as a metre of black tip shark launched and spiraled out of the water, busting me off again. Mystery solved, the river was again alive with sharks. Throughout the day I lost over a dozen of the bitey critters as they were rubbing and biting through the light leader with ease.



The sharks were on duty on this trip and liked Paul's Pro-Cure scented ZMan plastics.

A solo slab of chrome.



I pushed up onto a small gravel bar, where I had had success before and pulled a small flathead almost straight away. Then noticed a slight current line forming and so proceeded to work this over slowly, bumping the soft bait along the bottom and then down the drop-off on the outside. It was on the fourth or fifth cast, as the line went slack on the drop that it stopped and I thought it had hit bottom. But, no, a nice slab of chrome, cool water barra slashed through the water surface, trying to dislodge the little TT 1/4oz 1/0 HeadlockZ HD jighead.



Time and again it leapt clear, with me backing off so the light leader didn't rub through. A couple of minutes into the fight, after a long run along the mangrove edge and with me applying as much pressure as I dared, the fish decided to slug deep, diving into the deeper hole that I was fishing. It then became a slow and steady lift and wind, with some chaotic moments around the electric motor thrown in. Finally, the fish tired, its head popping clear of the water. I dipped the net and swam it in first go (that's my story and I'm sticking to it).

Ok, in reality the hook got stuck in the net and required a deal of luck to jiggle the fish in. A few happy snaps and another SEQ barra was sent on its way. Happy days. A few more small trevally completed the deal for the day, with no grunter still to be found.

By the time you read this the cool winds will have kicked in. In the Sandy Straights at Hervey Bay, when using the techniques described here, you should encounter jew, tailor, trevally, queenfish and grunter, as well as the larger quarry, barra and threadfin salmon. Work the low tide margins, all the way up to the high tide and this should find you tangling with plenty of different species. Get out there and get amongst 'em.

Tip of the day... If you are finding bites hard to come by, you are probably fishing the plastics too fast - fish light, fish slow, and the pics will tell the story.

Tight lines... Chewy

Paul prepares the salty for release.



PERFECT PADDLERZ



BY CAMERON CRONIN

Like most keen anglers out there, I'm always ready to jump at the opportunity to test new gear on my favourite target species, in the hope of discovering a new lure or technique that will stand out from the bunch and join a small handful of offerings in the 'go-to' category. So when I recently received a pack of ZMan 4" Scented PaddlerZ in the new Ralph's Shad colour to test out, it wasn't long before I had one rigged up and ready to cast at my favourite estuarine sportfish, the mulloway.

A quick dip in the water, on route to my destination, revealed an energetic tail beat and an aggressive body roll that had me pedaling as fast as my legs could propel my kayak in anticipation of making that first cast. Funnily enough, not ten seconds after my lure had hit the water I felt the tentative bump of a jewfish inhaling my lure through the braid and struck into an energetic little jewie that measured just under the NSW legal size of 70cm. Small beginnings for sure, but as I slipped him back into the water you couldn't wipe the smile off my face. I was certain I'd found the lure I'd been looking for.



The hybrid tail of the ZMan Scented PaddlerZ has quickly become a go-to for jewfish and snapper.

In the 6 months or so that have passed, since the session I just described, I've been using the ZMan PaddlerZ in both the 4" and 5" sizes borderline religiously for jewfish and snapper. To say they have exceeded expectations is definitely an understatement. In my opinion, the reason for this surprising success is simple.

Those who have got their hands on a pack of PaddlerZ will know that although this lure has a paddle tail, it is of a very similar profile and appearance to that of a 'jerk shad' style plastic. In other words, the PaddlerZ is essentially a hybrid, taking the more natural, baitfish like appearance of a jerk shad and bringing it to life with the addition of a small paddle tail. Alone this small tail wouldn't be enough to give the PaddlerZ the action that it has, but ZMan have cleverly 'segmented' the rear half of the lure, maximising tail movement and giving the lure an incredible action that has to be seen to be believed.

This combination of styles has resulted in an extremely versatile lure that, for me, has routinely resulted in more landed fish. In my case, before discovering the PaddlerZ, I had always had a strong preference for large profile paddle tail plastics when targeting mulloway. Unfortunately this profile seems to greatly reduce certain by-catch species I enjoy catching, including snapper, big bream, salmon and kingfish, which prefer the slimmer, 'baitfish' look of a jerk shad. Now, instead of alternating between two different rods with different lures, I can happily settle with a PaddlerZ, knowing that no matter what predator crosses paths with my lure, the end result will be me hooked up!





As I mentioned earlier, although the PaddlerZ is a fantastic all-rounder, the two species I believe that are most partial to this deadly little lure are jewfish and snapper. Both of these species are renowned jerk shad crunchers, so it should come as no surprise that they are also big PaddlerZ fans. Both species love to hit a lure on the drop and this means that a lure with plenty of action on the sink is a big step in the right direction and something that a conventional jerk shad does not achieve.

In addition to my estuary exploits on my local Sydney systems, a recent camping trip up on the NSW mid-north coast was a true testament to the PaddlerZ incredible snapper and jewie catching ability. As I had not spent much time fishing for snapper in the past, we started the trip fishing a wide variety of lure styles. As it turned out, despite our best efforts we were consistently out-fished by the rod rigged up with a PaddlerZ and being worked by the swell in the holder! This was to the point that by the end of the trip we were running up to 6 rods at once, almost all rigged up with 4 and 5 inch PaddlerZ! This was achieved by running two drift chutes, to slow our drift to a crawl and casting well ahead of our drift, before placing the rod in the holder and repeating with the other rods. Although we did have the odd tangle, the sound of 2, 3 or even 4 reels screaming off in unison made it more than worthwhile and we experienced some great snapper fishing, converting most of the snapper fishos in the campsite over to PaddlerZ with equally great results.

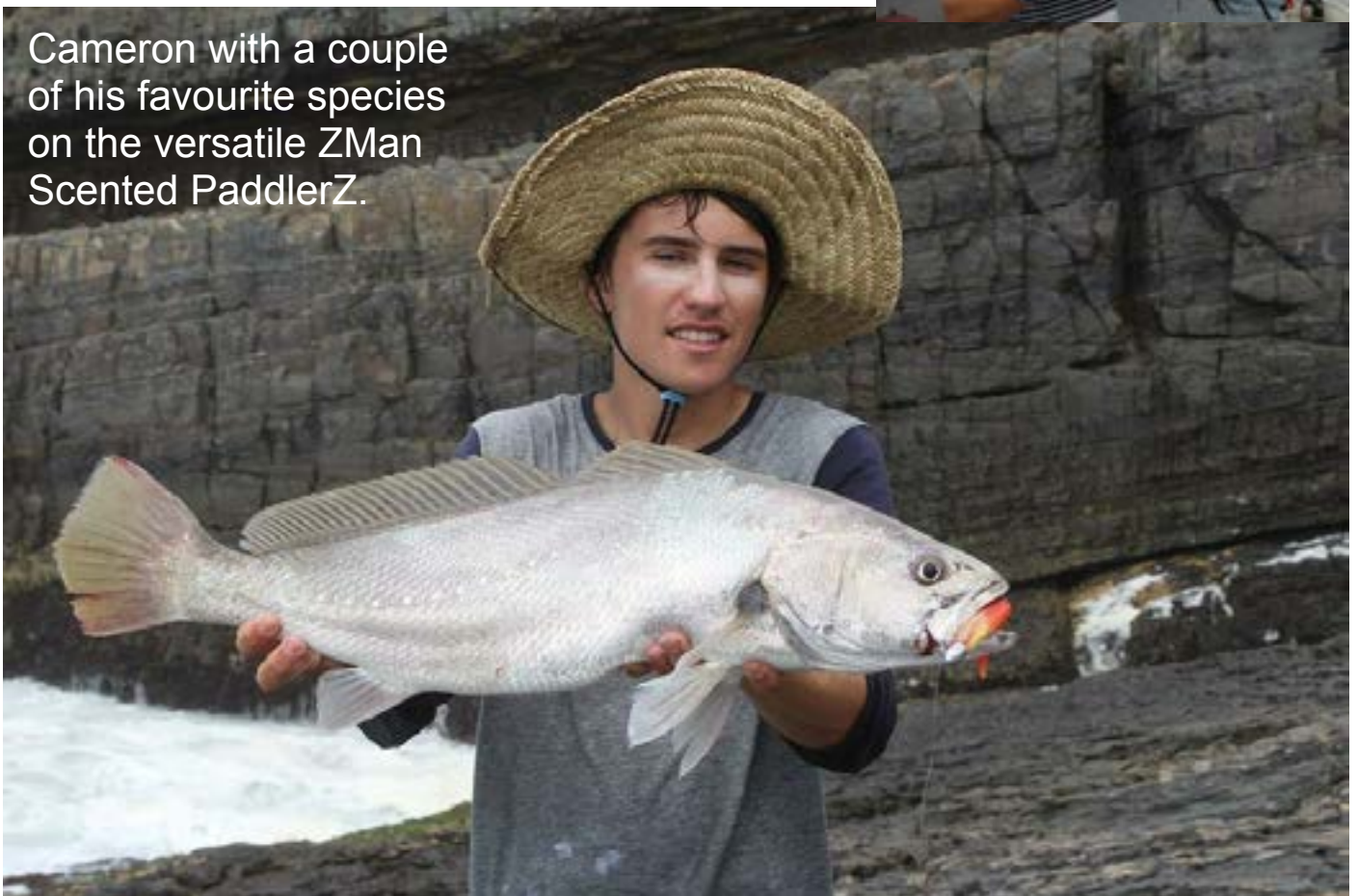
It was a similar story on the jewfish, with the PaddlerZ offshore domination continuing onto the rocks, where we landed unprecedented numbers of mulloway on this lure. The shape of the PaddlerZ lends itself ideally to being either hopped aggressively like a jerk shad or slow rolled like a paddle tail, a handy characteristic whilst fishing multiple spots in a single session.

This meant that no matter what the depth or bottom structure, we were able to continue fishing the same jighead and plastic, keeping rigging time to a minimum. For instance, the same 5" PaddlerZ in Pearl colour, rigged on a 3/4oz 6/0 TT HeadlockZ HD Jighead, accounted for plenty of jewies while being hopped through the depths, but was equally at home slow rolled over wave lashed reef and boulders in less than 3m of water, accounting for mulloway up to 124cm. Pretty versatile!

So, as you can probably tell, I can't get enough of the PaddlerZ for all the right reasons. They come in two sizes and a heap of colours to help you tackle whatever your species or conditions, have a killer action and most importantly, they absolutely smash the fish. Give them a shot, the fish might hate you for it... but I guarantee you'll love them!



Cameron with a couple of his favourite species on the versatile ZMan Scented PaddlerZ.



BREAMIN' VICTORIA

By Corey McLaren

The event that myself and Lewie (my team partner) were waiting for was finally here on our home water The Hopkins River in Warrnambool. A place that we have both grown up fishing and spend at least two days every week fishing, learning where the fish are, where the structure is and how to fish that structure. At the briefing the outlook wasn't good, with most teams who pre-fished saying that they struggled. This didn't make us feel real confident and to put another dampener on our chances of doing well we had last pick of the banks as we were boat 36 of 36 at the start of the first day.

Saturday morning I awoke to calm conditions and no rain, which was completely opposite to the forecast of twenty knot winds and 15-25mm of rain. My alarm sounded at 4:30am and my stomach was churning with nerves and anticipation of what these next two days would hold for us. I was that nervous I drove to the ramp and put the boat in at 5.30am and just sat there thinking about what we could do.

When 6:20am came by Lewie showed up and we started talking about our game plan. It was simple. Drive up the river until we found a bank that we liked fishing that had nobody on it. To our amazement the bank known as Rowans Lane had no boats on it, so that was our starting point.

The anticipation builds...



Using our go-to lure, the ZMan 2.5" GrubZ in Motor Oil colour fished on a 1/16oz TT Tournament jighead with a number 1 hook, we threw them in tight to the reeds and worked them slowly out off the mud flat. It didn't take long for the net to be used as my second cast produced a 31cm fish and this kick started our weekend. About ten casts later we had our second legal of 38cm, which Lewie landed on a crab lure. I continued to throw the GrubZ as it produces not only school size fish but the big fish that we were trying to land to really put a charge to the top. By 8.30am we had our bag of fish, ranging from 31-39cm and were quietly confident about how we would go.

We then moved up the system to the Hen and Chickens, trying to upgrade the 31cm fish which we had in our well from 7.10am. This paid off for us with a double hook up on a 34cm and a 38cm fish. The 38cm fish made it into our bag but the 34 was too small! This was the moment when we knew we had a great chance of potentially taking the event out. We started to try and find areas for the second day and rested our number one spot, but we kept catching 30-33cm fish, which I was pretty annoyed with as I knew these were the fish we needed tomorrow.

So instead we started fishing big fish spots and we missed a couple of chances on very big fish that just pulled hooks after being hooked. We stayed calm and kept our heads down but couldn't find any additional upgrades, so we headed in to put our key tags in, loaded the boat on and headed to the weigh-in at BCF.

The feeling of knowing you have done all you can and having a great day one bag is something I'll never get sick of, and rocking up to the weigh-in with friends and family cheering you on is something else. Our bag went on the scales and our thoughts were 4.2kg. It pulled them down to 4.17kg, which was an awesome start and would see us leading after day one. An early night for me was definitely in order, especially after getting drenched for most of the day.





On day two we awoke to light rain and a bit of wind that I wasn't sure how it would affect our bank. I got to the ramp at 6am, where Lewie and I unloaded the boat and checked in. The wait to get started killed me as I just wanted to get out there and smack them early. We took off in position one and went straight back to our flat at Rowans Lane... but something just didn't feel right. We landed five small fish from our first ten casts and were worried that the small brigade had moved in.

After plugging away for another twenty minutes I checked the side scan and noticed the better fish looked to have moved off the flat and onto the drop in about eight foot of water. My second cast produced a 36cm fish on the GrubZ and I thought that we were going to do something special out of the school, but it wasn't to be with only one other legal coming from that school at 29.5cm. It was panic stations all around.

Small fish upon small fish made the boat but the better fish were nowhere to be seen. So, with 3.5 hours left we decided to move up to Jubilee Park, where we stopped and talked to another team and that's when the sounder lit up with fish schooled up in fifteen foot of water... but, the same story as our last spot, small fish everywhere.

This was enough to drive me crazy. I moved the boat into the shallows and we started to fish the drop off where the water went from two foot and gradually dropped off to eight foot. This paid dividends as Lewie landed our third fish of 36cm and fourth of 34cm. We finally started to get really confident.

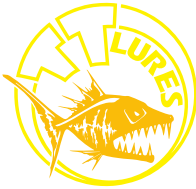
Half an hour went by without catching another nice fish and I didn't know what to do so we started fishing out deep in ten foot of water and this paid off big time with Lewie landing our fifth and biggest fish of the tournament. A 40cm kicker and it was high fives all around!

Unfortunately we couldn't upgrade our first fish, so it was back to the weigh-in with another reasonable bag. Friends and family were there everywhere and as I walked up to the scales with our bag I had a shiver down my spine. Bill Hartshorne placed the bag on the scales and it went 3.42kg. I wasn't very confident of holding onto first place. The wait for the weights to be calculated seemed to take forever and my heart was racing with anticipation. As second place was read out my face turned from a serious face to a smile from ear to ear and we knew it was what we dreamt of, a victory on our own turf. Weighing in 10/10 fish for 7.59kg we had done the ultimate in our angling career and taken out a tournament. Our go-to lures, the ZMan 2.5" GrubZ rigged on TT Tournament Series jigheads, were faultless throughout the tournament. We only used four plastics for the entire weekend each and a few jigheads. The key on the second day was to let the plastic sit on the bottom for about 5-10 seconds and the fish would decide whether or not to eat it. These plastics continue to amaze me with how long they last and how easy they are to use. On this weekend they were simply amazing.

Cheers Corey

The boys are absolutely stoked after a win on their home turf.





Rigging Guide

ZMan Soft Plastics - Choosing a TT HeadlockZ Jighead

This rigging guide is designed to assist you when matching a ZMan soft plastic and TT Lures HeadlockZ jighead. The HeadlockZ grub keeper has been designed to lock on the 10X Tough, yet super-soft and realistic, ZMan ElaZtech soft plastic, cast after cast, fish after fish!

ZMan Soft Plastic	HeadlockZ Jighead
2" CrusteaZ	2, 1
2" GrubZ	2, 1
2.5" GrubZ	2, 1, 1/0
2.5" Slim SwimZ	2, 1, 1/0
3" Scented PogyZ	2/0, 3/0, 4/0
3" MinnowZ	2/0, 3/0, 4/0
3" Scented ShrimpZ	2/0, 3/0, 4/0
3" Scented CrabZ	3/0, 4/0, 5/0
3.5" GrubZ	2/0, 3/0
3.75" StreakZ	2/0
4" StreakZ Curly TailZ	2/0, 3/0, 4/0
4" Finesse ShadZ	1/0, 2/0
4" DieZel MinnowZ	3/0, 4/0, 5/0
4" Scented PaddlerZ	3/0, 4/0
4" SwimmerZ	4/0, 5/0
4" Scented ShrimpZ	4/0, 5/0, 6/0
4" CrawdadZ	3/0, 4/0
4" Hard Leg FrogZ	6/0 ChinlockZ
4" Pop FrogZ	6/0 ChinlockZ
5" Pop ShadZ	6/0 ChinlockZ
5" GrubZ	4/0, 5/0
5" Scented PaddlerZ	4/0, 5/0
5" Grass KickerZ	5/0, 6/0
5" StreakZ	4/0, 5/0
5" Scented Jerk ShadZ	4/0, 5/0
6" SwimmerZ	5/0, 6/0, 7/0, 8/0
6" Pop FrogZ	8/0 ChinlockZ
7" Scented Jerk ShadZ	7/0, 8/0
8" StreakZ XL	7/0, 8/0
9" GrubZ	6/0, 7/0, 8/0

ZMan Soft Plastics

- 10X Tough - better stands up to pickers and toothies, more fish per lure.
- Super-soft realistic feel - maximum action and fish keep biting!
- Buoyant - rig to fish topwater to deep.
- Buoyant - Tail up action attracts fish and triggers Strikes.

TT HeadlockZ Finesse

- Built on a fine gauge, Japanese hook for the ultimate penetration with light lines and light drag settings.
- Unique 'head lock' grub keeper.

TT HeadlockZ HD Jighead

- Built on a brutally strong, chemically sharpened Mustad black nickel hook.
- Unique 'head lock' grub keeper.

Caring for your ZMan

- Store ZMan in their original packets - they may react with other plastics.
- Avoid storing lures in extreme heat for maximum life.

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