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for Bream

Angler: Owen McPaul

Species: Australian Bass

Lure: ZMan 3" MinnowZ (Houdini)

Jighead: TT Lures HeadlockZ HD



BASIC BASS TACTICS



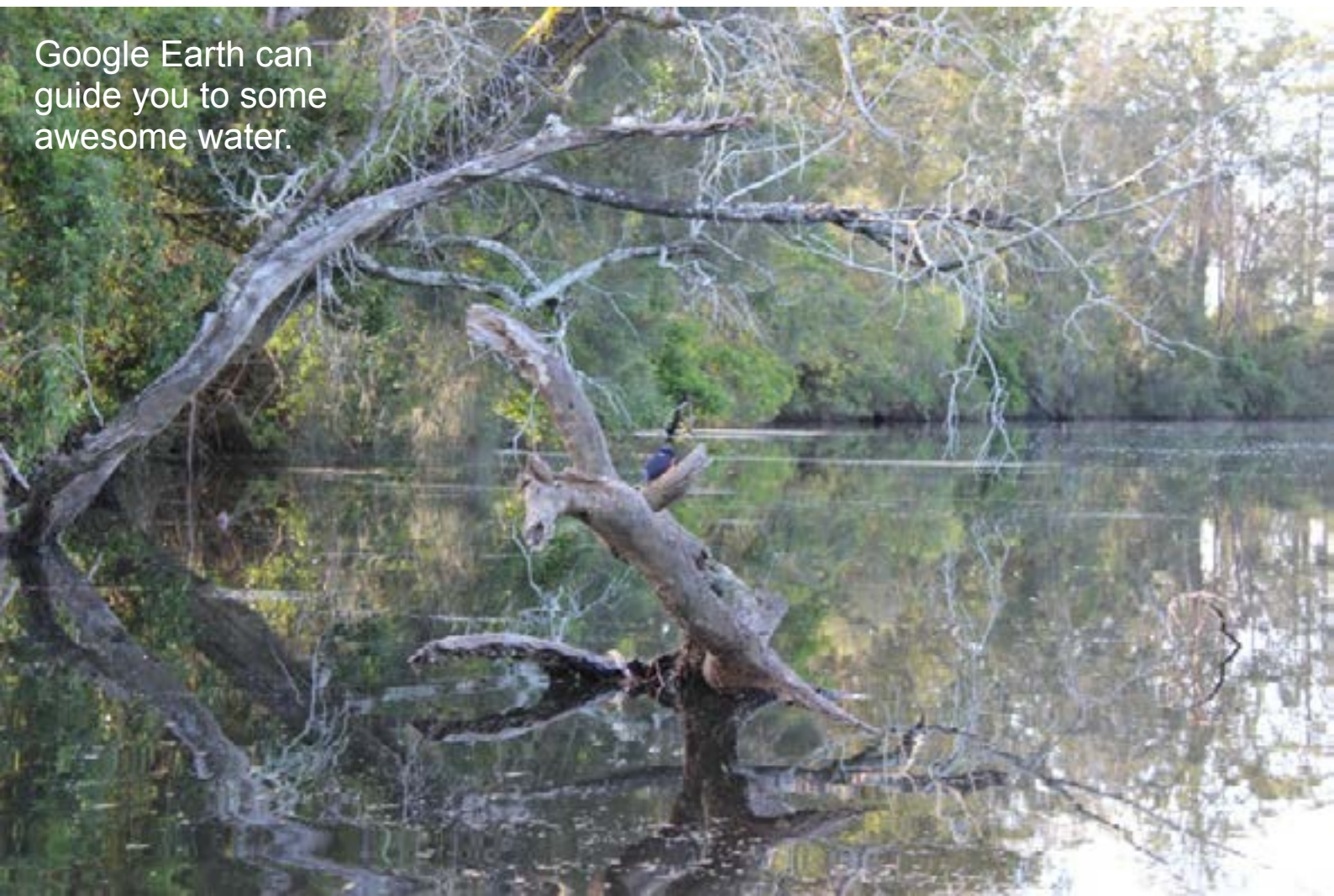
By Owen McPaul

The pursuit of the Australian bass on lure is something that has boomed in popularity over the past few years. Spots that remained secret for many are now popular and frequented regularly by many more and it seems as though to really capitalize on a day on the water you have to bring your A game or something that is more natural in presentation.

The Australian Bass is a species that holds a huge part of my heart and I find myself dedicating any spare minute I can to pursuing this iconic Australian freshwater sportfish. Lately myself and a few close mates have found ourselves pushing the boundaries and discovering new water to try and escape the crowds. We have been searching for water that is either extremely remote, or where access requires a mission in itself, dragging kayaks through dense bush with the aid of a sharp machete.

The past few months have consisted of a lot of investigation on Google Earth and generally a minimum of 20km of water at a time before reaching various exit points. So with the festive season now on us and a lot of us hoping to test our luck either locally or on the family holiday in a new location, how do you plan to attack the water and capitalize on your opportunities of catching that fish of a lifetime... with the added traffic or on that crazy planned mission that you only get to do a handful of times a year?

Google Earth can guide you to some awesome water.



Owen with a solid bass on his go-to 3" MinnowZ.



Being of a very competitive nature, with my mates much the same, below are a few favourite lures and techniques that I find myself consistently using every trip as we try to outdo each other and these lures and techniques are sure to bring a few to the net over the coming weeks as we hit a busy time of the year.

Plastics

It's no secret that plastics are by far my go-to lure presentation; it's a presentation I'm not only confident with but by all means the most natural in appearance.

I find time after time that when the bite ratios of most other popular lure presentations taper off the plastic is the undoing of a fish that is hiding tighter or deeper into undercut banks or structure as the day heats up. Not to mention the fish still out wide but much deeper in the water column.

When I look back at the past five years I can honestly say that some of my biggest bass have fallen during the heat of the day on plastic, when most anglers have packed up and gone home for the day. This technique comes from an understanding, shared with me by one of the most knowledgeable anglers I know, of what's actually happening in the water during that time and why the plastic lure is the go to presentation.

Briefly, as the sun heats the water the fallen debris and weed begins to breakdown and the bottom begins to stir and become active. This is what the microorganisms feed on. As the microorganisms become active the bait, including your smelt, gudgeon, shrimp and other baits become active as they feed on the microorganisms. In turn, as the bait becomes active the Australian bass, although tucked away, is planning an attack on the baitfish that while feeding have become complacent of their surroundings. With that knowledge in mind here's two of my go-to plastics and the retrieval used.

ZMan 3" MinnowZ

The 3" MinnowZ are by far my all-time favourite. It's a lure that seems to be the perfect size, hook up rates stand alone and it's a lure that is working from the second it hits the water. The tail is at full swing during the descent and pushes a good amount of subtle vibration throughout the retrieve.

Generally I rig them on a 1/8oz to 1/6oz size 2/0 TT HeadlockZ jighead when in the river and the retrieval used is so basic that it still to this day amazes me more people aren't out there using it. Before casting look for structure, like fallen timber, undercut banks where bass might be tucked away hiding and even bullrush and river grass where bait should be holding tight.



Plastics are a consistent producer for Owen.

Firstly I like to skip cast my plastic as tight as I can to the structure mentioned. The skip cast hopefully gives a bass the opportunity to be drawn from further afield as the lure bounces across the water surface. After the final skip I like to let the plastic fall alongside logs or down the face of the river bank, letting the tail action do its thing on the fall and I usually use a three second countdown, then give the lure one quick hop, before commencing a steady, consistent, slow retrieve back to the boat or kayak. The depth the plastic runs at can be varied with occasional pauses or a slower retrieve and it's really that simple, but so effective.

ZMan 2.5" Slim SwimZ

This lure, in comparison to the 3" MinnowZ, is small in scale but don't let its size fool you because on a steady retrieve it has a unique action and a side kick manoeuvre that can draw in the biggest of fish. It really is a versatile lure and with the addition of a TT Jig Spinner or rigged on a TT Rev Head jighead it becomes a whole new monster of its own and one that performs very well on a steady retrieve in skinny water.

The smaller Slim SwimZ profile has proven dynamite on the bass.





Owen with a beast
on the Slim SwimZ.

This little lure I like to use for what I call shaking. When I say shaking I am referring to a rapidly moved rod tip that causes the plastic to have a very erratic action over a small area of water.

Mostly, when shaking Slim SwimZ, I'm looking for the nastiest tree snags that I can find and putting deep casts into them... what we like to refer to as tiger country. The trick is to visualize the tree underwater, get your lure to sit above and amongst the sticks and limbs and shake it out. I usually rig these on a 1/12oz to 1/8oz TT HeadlockZ jighead and as explained, shake the rod tip erratically while still keeping contact with a slow retrieved reel. You're going to catch some snags but it's a pretty exciting battle as you attempt to extract a quality fish from out of no man's land.

Spinnerbaits are an excellent option for fishing in snaggy areas.



Spinnerbaits

By all means the spinnerbait is the most unconventional bass catching lure design, but you really can't argue with its ability to trigger a big reaction bite and its efficient snag resistant design that sees you retrieving lures through places where you wouldn't put anything else in your tackle box. A perfect lure for rolling over, in and around deep sunken timber, but for me personally I have found it most effective in and around thick weed. In these areas you really can't fish much else and the aim is to turn the attention of a bass and encourage it to reveal itself from inside a matted mess.

In the rivers, when targeting weed, I mostly use the TT Lures Vortex spinnerbaits in weights from 1/4oz to 3/8oz, depending on water depth or flow. They really are as simple to use as casting, allowing time to sink and then commencing a super slow retrieve. The only trick to spinnerbaits is to wind as slow as possible and as long as the blades are turning over you're doing it right. Most people who are new to spinnerbaits make the mistake of retrieving the lure too quickly, so remember slow and steady wins the race.

ZMan 4" Hard Leg FrogZ

Last but not least is one of my favourite topwater presentations, the ZMan Hard Leg FrogZ. You can't go bass fishing and not at least try your luck at a massive surface explosion. For those not familiar, early morning or late afternoon are the best times for topwater baits as bass are more willing to eat off the surface of the water.

For this one there's not a lot of skill involved. Rig the frog on a TT Lures size 4/0 ChinlockZ jighead, pitch your cast tight to banks, trees or weed, allow the lure to sit for a second or two and with a medium to fast retrieve wind the lure across the top of the water. They call this one the barra burn and when a bass commits to taking the FrogZ topwater it's at speed and usually a near airborne explosive and highly addictive take.



A nice bass that boofed a FrogZ off the surface.

GOLD PROSPECTING...



By Vinnie Versfeld

Golden snapper, or fingermark as they are also known, are super fun fish to chase on soft plastics and micro jigs. With them being closely related to mangrove jack they are formidable fighters that will seek out any weakness in your gear and use it to their advantage to get away. They will let you know that you are in business, from a 30cm specimen right through to 75+cm model! Fingermark are most definitely worth the time and effort and here I will go through a few of my techniques used for locating them and how I go about getting a few into the boat.

Where

Fingermark are fairly easily accessible once you find suitable ground and a few spots, as they tend to hang around in the same areas. They frequent deeper sections of the main creeks, with rubble or rocky bottom, but here I will be concentrating on finding them in open water.

A sounder that provides good bottom information is a fantastic help and I think nowadays these are in reach of most people with the advances in echo sounding technology. Make sure you know how to read your sounder and have a fair understanding of how it works. The Navionics phone or web app has also helped me find some great country, thanks to their updated contour maps. Look for a slight rise off a normal bottom contour as this will most likely be gravel or shoal ground and these are the areas where you will find the fingermark.



Vinnie with a solid fingermark on a Golden Boy coloured ZMan.

Cod are a by-catch species that can mean you are in the right area.



Bottom structure, for example gravel, rocks, shale or scattered reef, is essential for one reason, BAIT! From here in Townsville all the way out to the reef is pretty barren and flat, so anything that can offer the slightest bit of a current break and some cover is a baitfish magnet and this in turn brings in the predators. My preferred depth for finding fingermark is between 6 and 14m, as I have found this to be the most productive depth range for schooling fish.

A sure fire and often frowned upon by-catch when chasing fingermark are cod, most often black and gold spot cod. If you are catching them then you can be sure that you are in good country as they are very camouflage dependant. If you find them then stick around as there will most likely be other predators in the area. If you are working a small patch of structure it normally doesn't take too long to weed through the cod as they are very territorial, so there probably won't be too many around.

I also rely heavily on my GPS. Once I have found a suitable bit of bottom I will mark it and then drive around a little bit and also mark any significant bumps, rises and holes. The reason for this is that as the tidal run changes the current changes, positioning bait differently on each tide. I also mark schools of bait. It sounds like a lot of marking but it's a good guideline for setting up a drift and I have often found bait sitting on structure where I have marked them on previous trips.

I prefer drifting over the spots rather than anchoring or spot locking with the electric motor as this covers a bit more ground. I have also found that the bigger sized fingermark always hang on the outskirts of the main schools that are generally made up of the smaller or more average sized fish.

Right, so now we've located some cracking bottom with scatterings of bait and the boat is set up for a drift...

Tackle

Tackle wise I run two outfits, one is a 2500 size reel, spooled with 10lb braid to a 45lb fluoro leader, on a 6'6" medium action rod. On this rod I will run my ZMan 3" MinnowZ on 3/0 TT Lures HeadlockZ HD jigheads, ranging in weight from 1/4oz through to 1/2oz. I will start off with the lightest jigheads first and work my way heavier until I can maintain good contact with the bottom. Wind, tide, depth and drift speed will govern what weight is ideal for your situation, although the general rule is to fish the lightest you can get away with. Up here I find in 10-12m of water, with a 1.5m run and a 1km/h drift speed, I can comfortable get away with 3/8oz, without losing too much contact with the bottom.

Anthony landed this nice fingermark on a ZMan 3" MinnowZ.





A wire bite trace can see you hooked up to these guys a bit longer.

The other outfit is a 4000 size reel on a 6' med/heavy rod, spooled up with 15lb also through to 45lb fluoro leader. This outfit runs my larger plastics like ZMan 5" Scented Jerk ShadZ or ZMan 5" StreakZ, ZMan 4" DieZel MinnowZ and also TT Vector micro jigs. The same rule as before applies and with the micro jigs I run the 15 and 25g sizes. When it comes to the micro jigs I'm more concerned with matching the baitfish's profile and size than weight.

Often where the fingermark are found you are bound to get some odd ball by-catches. Expect and be prepared for anything. We have caught everything from coral trout, grunter, golden trevally, stingrays, cod and quite often mackerel, to doggies through to Spaniards!

When the razor gang gets around you can avoid having an expensive day on the gear by adding a 'bite trace'. A bite trace is a short (6-8") piece of nylon coated stainless steel wire that I run above my plastic to avoid bite offs. Wire in the 20-30lb range is sufficient not to impair your lures action, while still giving you time to boat a toothy critter. The way that I rig this is by joining the steel wire to my leader with a uni knot / figure 8 knot combination, making the uni with my leader line and the figure 8 on my steel wire, before snugging them up. I also attach the wire to the lure with a figure 8 knot.

A good thing to remember when knotting nylon coated steel wire is to slide your knots instead of pulling them tight as pulling them will cause pig tailing. I hope to do a YouTube clip on this so stay tuned. It's a simple method that's saved me hundreds of dollars' worth of gear.

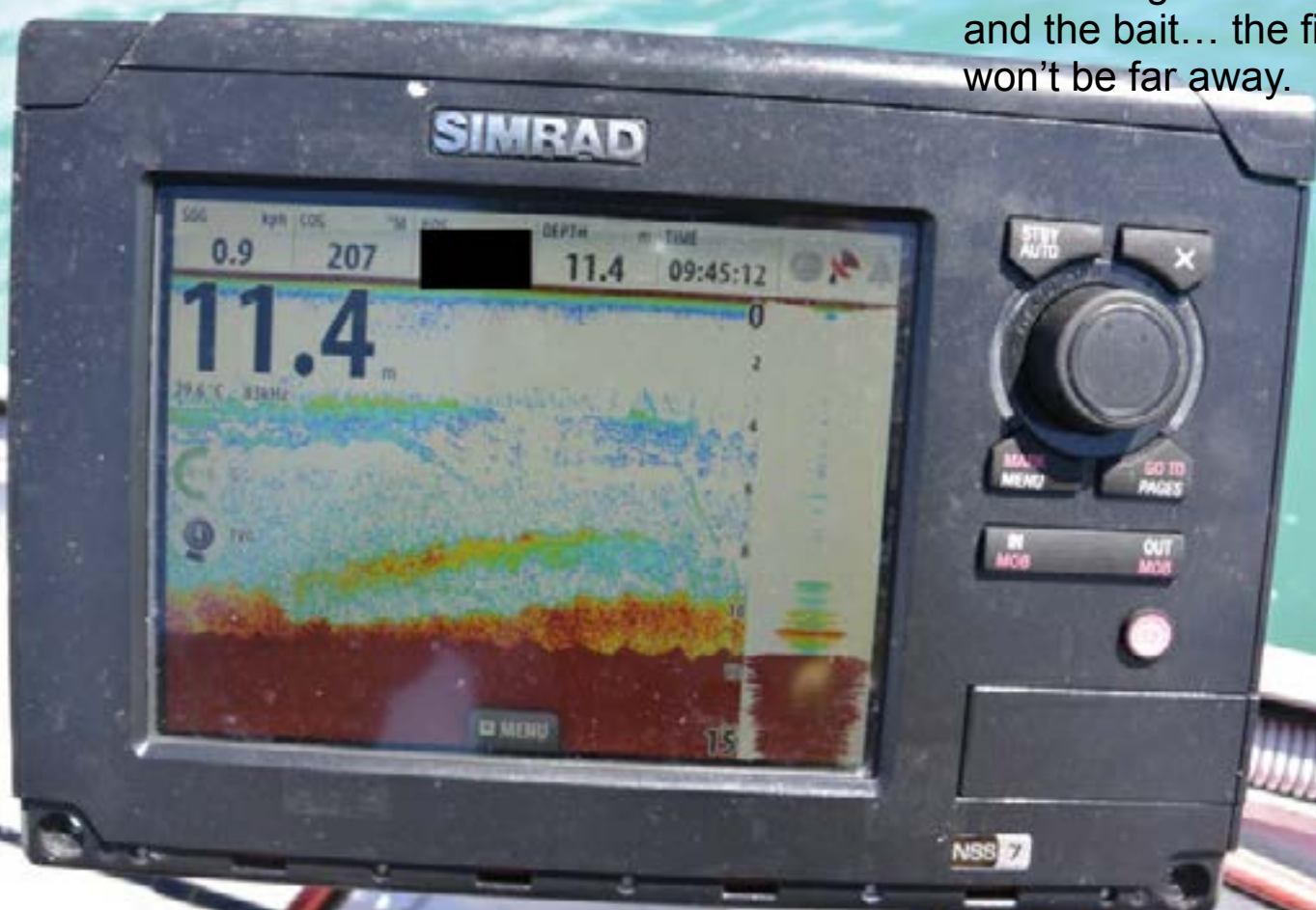
Technique

Right, so now that all that is covered you want to set up your drift. I start off roughly 20m up wind or current from my mark and wait for the boat to settle before I drop to the bottom. I always use a controlled drop as quite often you will get nailed on the way down. I also take a mental note of how long it should take for me to get to the bottom, that way you can be prepared if something sneakily inhales your bait on the way down. If in doubt engage the reel, slowly lift the rod and have a feel, if there is weight then set the hook!

Plastics

I find the 3" MinnowZ an extremely effective plastic for fingermark. I think they have a perfect size and profile to match most things in a fingermark's diet, namely baitfish and prawns. Colour wise I think gut instinct is the winner, along with having confidence in what you are using. If I had to choose three colours in MinnowZ for fingermark, it would be Pinfish, Golden Boy and Pearl and in that order.

Find the right bottom and the bait... the fish won't be far away.



Vinnie with a chunk of
fingermark on the Golden Boy
coloured ZMan 3" MinnowZ.



Once you're on the bottom let the lure sit for a second, then give it a rod length of constant tension lift and then a controlled drop to the bottom. I then do three short hops before allowing it to swim back to the bottom again. As I drift along over the mark I will systematically let more line out to stay in contact with the bottom throughout the drift. If this gets more difficult, due to additional current or a faster drift, then I will do more drops in the drift, instead of one drop for the whole drift. I find that the fingermark hug the bottom, below the bait and that's why it's so important to keep in contact with the bottom.

Hits from fingermark are very varied and sometimes it feels like you have snagged a bit of weed and it just feels different. While other times it feels like a rattle bite, like you are chasing bream on a peeled prawn... right through to just getting poleaxed out of nowhere and slammed to the gunnel! If in doubt, SET THE HOOK! I'd rather air strike a few times than miss potential hook ups. This is also the reason that I run a longer, softer rod on the smaller plastics as this gives the fish time to 'eat' the plastic.

If you get to the end of the drift 'jig, drop, jig, drop, jig, drop' and then wind the plastic back to the boat. Quite often this will scatter the bait and entice a reaction strike. It's also a favourite time for the mackerel to come and have a play.

Micro jigs / blades / larger plastics

Here again, as with the MinnowZ style plastics, I don't think colour is such a big issue but in this case I tend to go with brighter colours like Pink Hussar, Nuclear Chicken, Bruised Banana and my all-time favourite, Space Guppy. The reason I think the brighter colours work better is because the faster retrieves of these styles of lures rely on a reaction strike is and the bright, fast moving lures get more attention.

When fishing micro jigs I drop them to the bottom and lift them up a rod length firmly, before commencing a controlled drop back to the bottom. I do this until I reach the thickest part of the bait school and there I will fast jig the micro jig or blade through the bait but not all the way to the surface, before dropping it back down and jiggling it up again. I find that this scatters the baitfish, creates panic and makes the jig or blade stand out, just as the fingermark's attack mode has been activated by the scattering bait.

Micro jigs are another effective option. Try matching the size of the bait.



Nine out of ten times hits come as you are jigging through the school. That's why I run a faster action rod for this application, as it allows me to automatically set the hook in the retrieve, when the fish hits the lure.

Once you have hooked up you can enjoy a head bumping fight, with short powerful runs. Fingermark will dog you all the way to the net and don't be surprised if they make a couple of good solid runs just when you think they are spent.

So go out and find some gold... it's worth the search!

TT Switchblades and Ghostblades have also caught their share of fingermark.



Beach Softies

By Justin Willmer



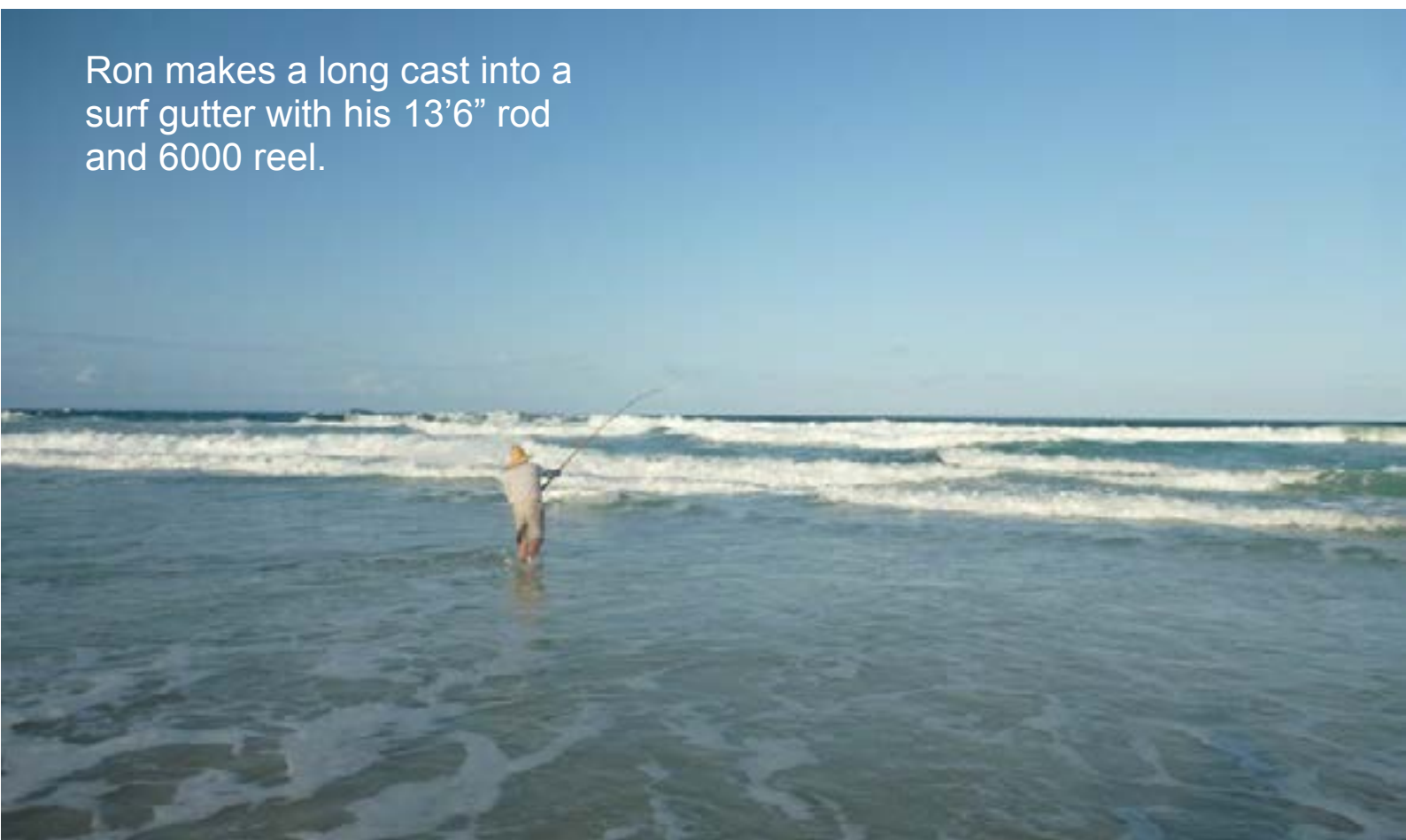
Anglers fishing the beach and surf commonly throw metal slugs, surface lures and the odd hard body, however for the last few years it's been soft plastics that have dominated our captures. They look realistic, are available in a stack of styles, colours and sizes, can be weighted to fish anywhere in the water column, retrieved using an almost endless combination of retrieves and with the development of ZMan 10X Tough ElaZtech plastics they can even handle the toothy critters.

Over time we have successfully targeted a wide range of species in the surf, throwing a variety of plastics and here's a general guide to the styles of plastics we throw.

Paddle Tails – loads of action built into the tail and can be retrieved at a wide range of retrieve speeds from a fast burn to a slow roll or hopping retrieve. This versatility makes them the plastic we tie on first, with go-to models including the ZMan 3" MinnowZ, 4" DieZel MinnowZ and 4" SwimmerZ.

Jerk Baits – have straight tails with little action built-in. This means that they cast long distances, sink fast and come to life when twitched and hopped with the rod tip. They are deadly on a fast, twitchy retrieve that represents a fleeing baitfish, but don't be afraid to slow them down. Our go-to models include ZMan 5" StreakZ, 5" Scented Jerk ShadZ and 7" Scented Jerk ShadZ.

Ron makes a long cast into a surf gutter with his 13'6" rod and 6000 reel.



The ZMan 3” MinnowZ is a versatile favourite on the beach.

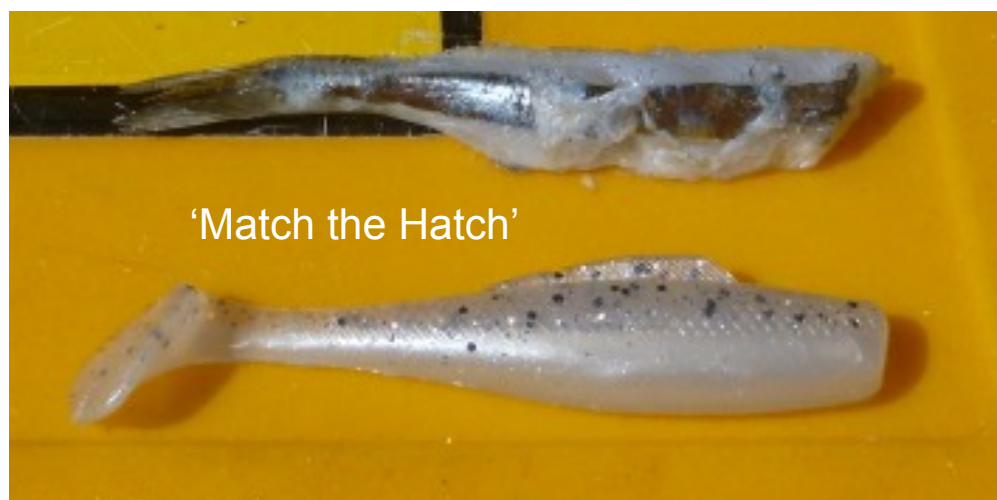


Curl Tails – have plenty of built-in action and are especially effective when prospecting gutters using slower retrieves for flathead, mulloway, golden trevally and other species that often feed lower in the water column. Our go-to curl tails include ZMan 2.5” GrubZ, 3.5” GrubZ, 4” StreakZ Curly TailZ and 9” GrubZ.

Crustaceans – have been effective in areas with less aggressive surf, where fish are actively feeding across the flats. They can be deadly when a more subtle, slower presentation is required, especially when sight casting fish. Our go-to crustaceans are the ZMan 3” Scented ShrimpZ and 3” Scented CrabZ.

Colour

When it comes to colours there are two main types of colours that we carry in our kit – natural and fluoro. The natural colours come into their own in clear water and when there is little foam in the water. Natural favourites include Pearl, Pearl Blue Glimmer, Opening Night and Bad Shad. When the water is more turbulent, foamy or dirty, it may be time to tie on a fluoro, however these fluoro colours can also be effective when fish aren't eating your natural colours in the clean water. Our go-to fluoro colours include a range of pinks - Bubble Gum, Pink Glow, Coconut Ice Glow – and chartreuse colours – Chartreuse Glow, Electric Chicken and Space Guppy.



Where to throw plastics

You can throw plastics anywhere when fishing the beach and surf but try and think about where the fish would be holding and why.

Bait & Birds

Keep an eye out for bait and birds working as there is an old saying, 'find the bait, find the fish'. I have often followed bait or birds working a school of bait along the beach and it often doesn't take long for a predator or two to turn up and the bait to start showering out of the water.

Structure

When it comes to most types of fishing, structure is king. Beaches can often appear void of structure and very similar for kilometres, so it's important to look for structure that can hold bait, offer protection and create eddies where fish can escape the current and ambush bait. Examples of structure may include a point, deeper hole, drop off or any patches of rock.

This point produced tailor, queenfish and trevally, that also joined the flathead in the visible hole on a high tide.



An example of a nice deep gutter between the outer foamy break and the shore break.



Surf Gutters

Surf gutters refer to a deeper section of water between the beach and an outer bank. At times a gutter will run for kilometres along a beach with very little change, so keep an eye out for variations in the landscape such as a break in the outer bank, a deeper hole or sections that have more or less foamy water across the surface of the gutter. Some species prefer a foamy gutter while others will be found in cleaner deeper gutters.

The go-to surf gutter will be one that has more than one break in the outer bank, allowing fish to enter and exit the gutter easily and without threat of being trapped. Throw plenty of casts around both sides of the entry and exit to the gutter, also paying extra attention to any eddies that are being created by the water surging in and out of the gutter.



Jighead Selection

The common belief is to fish the lightest jighead possible and I would agree with this when fishing the surf as it presents the plastic more naturally, however you do need to have enough weight to cast the plastic and stay in contact with it.

We will generally rig the smaller plastics, around 2-2.5", with a 1/8, 1/6 or 1/4oz jighead, depending on the distance required to reach the fish holding water and how aggressive the wave action is. The more aggressive the surf, generally the heavier jighead we will tie on and the retrieve speed often increases a little to keep in contact with the plastic.

As we step up to 3-4" plastics we will generally fish 1/4oz at the lightest, with 3/8oz and 1/2oz more popular. Our go-to plastic for tailor in the surf is a ZMan 3" MinnowZ in a natural baitfish colour, such as Pearl Blue Glimmer, Bad Shad or Opening Night, rigged on a 1/2oz TT Lures HeadlockZ HD jighead as this can be cast a decent distance, is heavy enough to bounce along the bottom in search of other species or commence a quicker, twitchy retrieve and the tailor or salmon in the south will be all over it. A ZMan 4" SwimmerZ on a 3/4oz 5/0 can be a good step up for larger species in the system, including Queenfish and trevally.

Sheri with one of 22 tailor from a morning session on ZMan 3" MinnowZ.



When stepping up again to 5-8" plastics an increase in jighead size may be on the cards again, with 3/4oz – 2oz being common options and a step up to a longer, stronger rod capable of throwing these plastics and larger spinning reel capable of handling big fish a good idea.

Rods & Reels

A set of three rods will have you covered for most applications.

Light – A 7', 3-6kg spin rod and 2500 size spin reel loaded with 10lb braid and 14-40lb leader is a great all-rounder for light applications from dart and flathead, to average size tailor, trevally, salmon, etc. We have landed some cracker fish on this gear, often after chasing them a kilometre or more down the beach, including queenies over a metre and 60cm+ GTs, however you need to keep in mind the water movement, surges, wave action and other variables that put the advantage firmly in the fish's favour. If you are frequently likely to encounter larger models it's worth stepping up in rod and reel size.

Medium – A 7'-10', 5-10kg spin rod and 4000-5000 spin reel loaded with 20lb braid and 20-60lb leader gives you the confidence, line capacity and drag pressure to tangle with some larger fish, including big salmon and tailor, Queenfish, trevally, mulloway, tuna, kingfish, cobia, mackerel and more. You won't always win the fight but this gear is still light enough to throw all day and even smaller species still offer good sport on this tackle.

A feed of tailor ready for filleting.



A selection of plastics rods rigged.

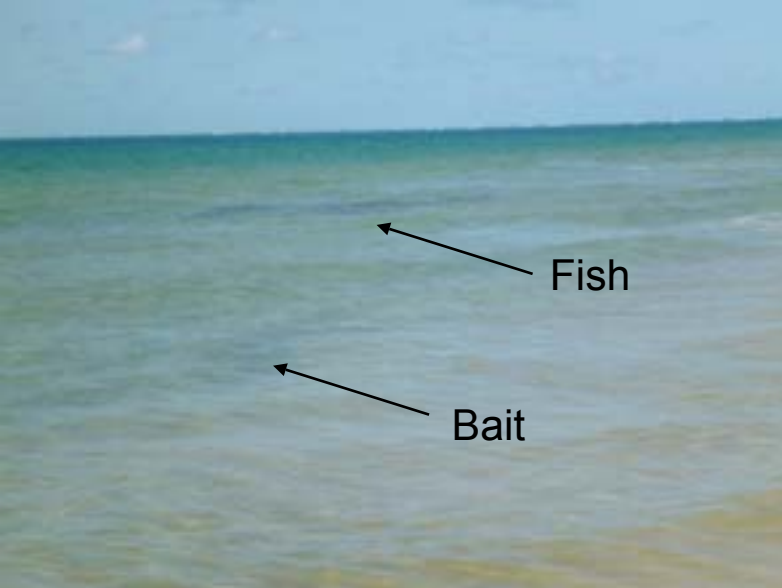


Sheri with a decent tailor.



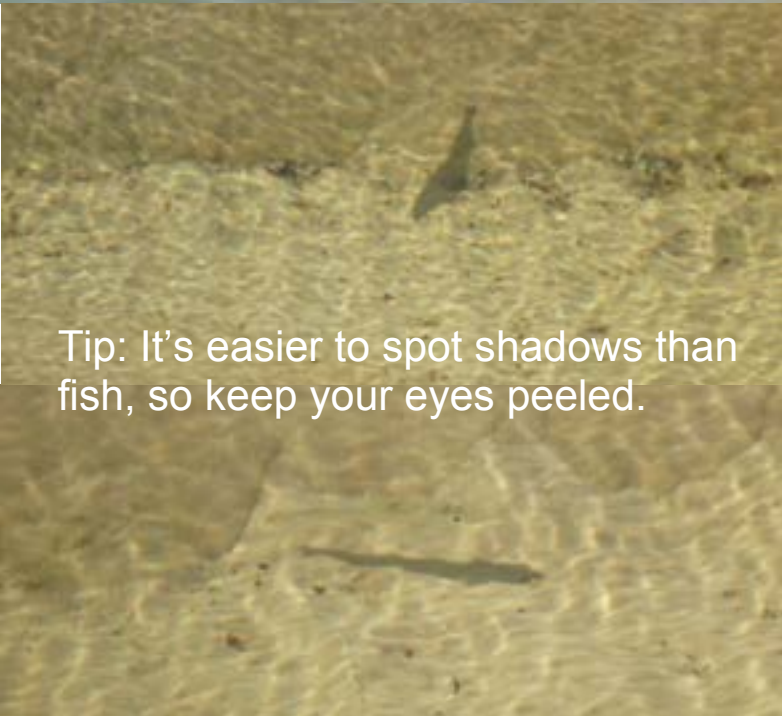
The beach cart is handy when tides restrict vehicle usage.





Fish

Bait



Tip: It's easier to spot shadows than fish, so keep your eyes peeled.



Flathead country at low tide.



Heavy – The heaviest soft plastic combo that I carry is a 13'6" surf rod that is rated to throw up to around two ounces, fitted with a 6000-8000 size spinning reel, loaded with 30-40lb braid and 40-80lb leader. This still won't stop everything and I have had to pop the lure as I am about to run out of 300 metres of braid after hooking what looked like a small black submarine, however I have also landed metre plus GTs and Queenfish, kingfish, big longtail tuna and various other speedsters from the sand. This gear is also still manageable and can be cast for extended periods of time. There's no point having an elephant gun if you can only fire a few shots and then you need to sit down... the more time your lure spends in the water, the more likely it is to be eaten. Over time you will crack a pattern in terms of the areas, tides, moon phases and other variables that fire up the fishing in your area, but for starters the more casts you throw, the more likely you are to catch a few.

The Zman 3" MinnowZ producing a few flatties.



Retrieves

There is no right or wrong retrieve and mixing it up is important as it will allow you to work out what the fish want on the day and also what species are in the area. We mix up the time we allow the plastic to sink before commencing the retrieve, the speed of the retrieve, whether twitches or hops are added and how aggressive these are, whether pauses are added and for how long and how frequent. If you are retrieving fast and aggressive the whole time in search of Queenfish, mackerel, tuna, GTs and other speedsters, you may be missing out on goldens, flathead, mulloway and other species hunting lower in the water column.

Recently we followed a school of tailor along the beach casting ZMan 3" MinnowZ and after a fish or two the bite would stop, switch the retrieve and the bite would start again. We switched between three main retrieves, a slow roll (slow wind), a more aggressive burn (fast wind) and kill (pause), and a retrieve that consisted of a slow wind with a few twitches and pauses added. If there is more than one of you fishing, try fishing different retrieves until you crack a pattern.

A couple more victims for the ZMan 3" MinnowZ.



Sheri with a trevally caught at night thanks to the tail beat of the ZMan 4" SwimmerZ.



A few additional tips that may get you hooked up.

1. Lead any spotted fish with the cast, meaning cast ahead of the fish or school you have spotted so that your lure looks like a fleeing baitfish, rather than something attacking the fish or school from the side or behind.

2. When retrieving plastics in heavy surf try and keep your plastic holding in the wave as it builds and starts to break, then allow it drop off the back before the waves break. Fish will often surf in with the wave and whether it's a dart, Queenfish or big golden, it's pretty awesome to watch the wave build, see your plastic in the wave and then see a fish spot it, hit the afterburners, grab your plastic and come busting out through the front of the wave.

Don't disregard plastics in the surf, they catch a wide range of species, including large predatory fish. Up your jighead weights a little for casting, select a brutally strong TT HeadlockZ HD jighead, rig it with a 10X Tough ZMan plastic so that you can land multiple fish on the one plastic, including toothy critters, and hit the beach... that fish of a lifetime is only a cast away.

See you on the beach...
Justin Willmer



Matching The Hatch CANALS



By Will Smedley

Summer is a time where, in most canals in southeast Queensland, large amounts of jelly prawns will be seen lining up around mud banks, pontoons and weed beds. These are a staple food source for many predators. Firstly, targeting fish that are feeding on jelly prawns is easier than expected as these little prawns will congregate wherever pieces of structure can be found and can generally be seen easily. While fishing natural structure such as fallen trees, while prawns are around, surface lures are a great choice, including plastics rigged for fishing the surface. Fish will wait in ambush under logs and trees waiting for a baitfish or prawns in distress. A surface lure will look like a prawn flicking about and most fish won't be able to resist.

Weed beds are another great place to find fish feeding on jelly prawns and personally one of my favourites. Species such as flathead, trevally and bream will frequent these areas in search of an easy meal. Weed beds are a good hideout for these fish as they can wait in ambush and gorge themselves on unsuspecting prawns.

Bream love jelly prawns and natural colours are a good starting point.



A canal trevally on a
Hardy Head coloured
ZMan GrubZ.



While fishing these areas I like to use lures that match the colours and patterns of the bait in the area. ZMan 3" MinnowZ in Opening Night colour are a great representation of most prawns and small bait fish and a great all round lure for flathead, bream and trevally. If you find the fish are finicky though and only eating the smallest of prawns, the ZMan 2" GrubZ is a sure way to get them to bite. When imitating jelly prawns I can't think of a better lure to use. All colours will work but my favourites are Hardy Head, Glow Bone and Chartreuse Sparkle. When these small curl tails are rigged lightly on TT Lures HeadlockZ Finesse jigheads from weights as light as 1/20oz to 1/12oz with a size 1 or 2 hook, they will help you stay in the strike zone for as long as you can.

When casting these lures I love to mix up the retrieve and I mostly alternate between a fast two hop retrieve, with a long slow sink, or a much slower slow roll and sink retrieve. Utilising different retrieves can be the reason why you catch or don't catch fish. On one day they could be very lethargic, waiting for bait to swim past their nose, while at other times they may be active hunters chasing prey in and out of the weed beds, so mixing it up and finding out how they are eating will ultimately equal more fish in the boat.

Precision casts should see you hooked up around the pontoons and other structure.



Lastly and one of the best places to target many species is around pontoons. This man-made structure holds massive amounts of bream, mangrove jack, trevally and countless other species. Pontoons are a great place to target fish as where there is structure and shade, there is bait and big fish to follow. Precision casts have to be made while fishing pontoons to ensure the lure attracts the fish's attention, while also not scaring them.

Small lures again work well, such as the ZMan 2.5" Slim SwimZ and ZMan 3.75" StreakZ, rigged lightly on TT jigheads. I have found brighter colours, such as Pink Glow and Coconut Ice Glow, really draw the fish out from their hiding places under the pontoons, enticing the strikes.

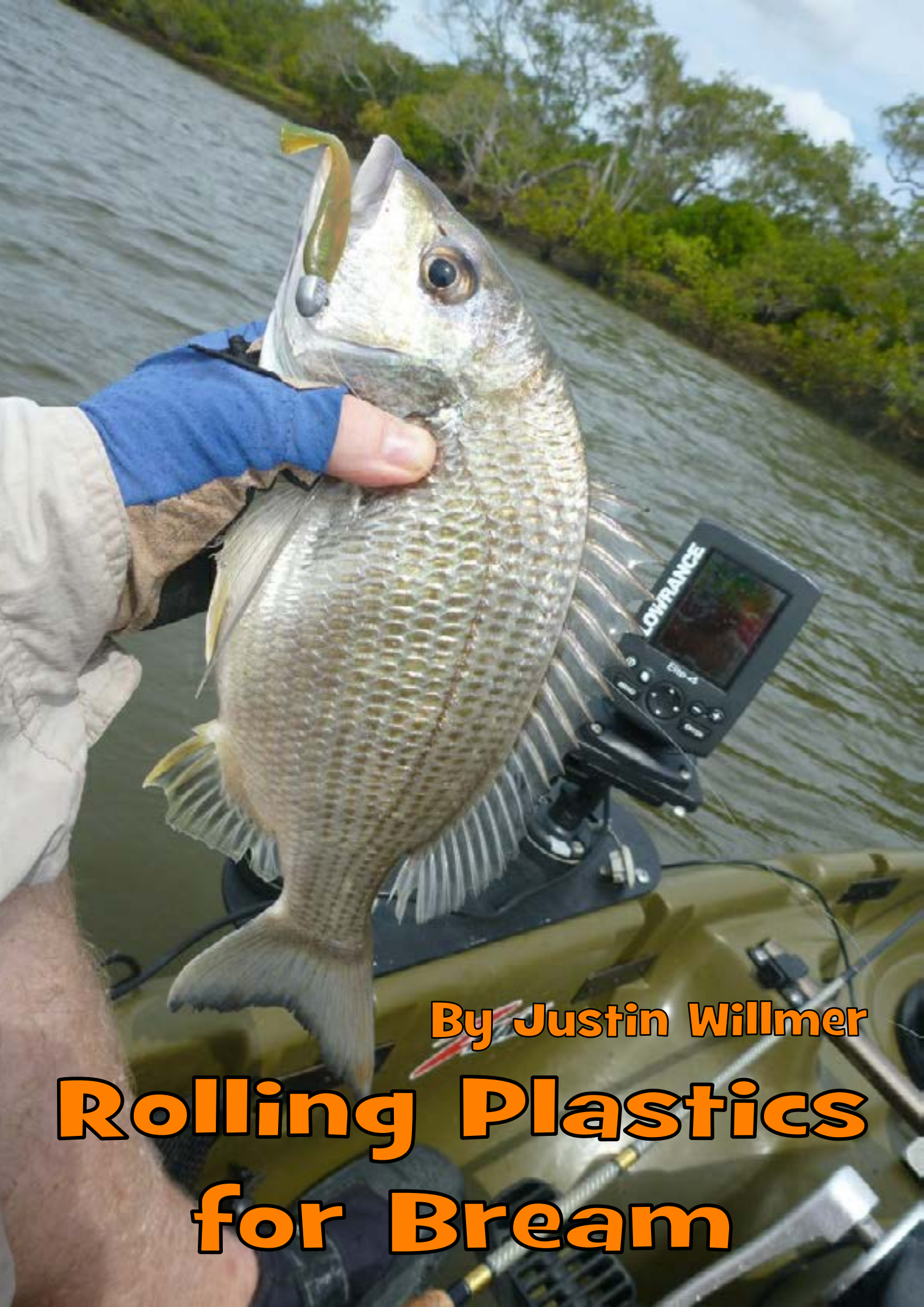


To create a reaction from trevally and other fast swimming species holding under pontoons, a fast wind and fast twitch retrieve is an easy way to fire them up. This retrieve is simple. Firstly, after you cast up against the pontoon it is very important to let your lure sink. This will get the fish's attention and let them know your lure is there. Then commence a fast wind and an aggressive rod twitching action to bring your lure up from the bottom and back to the boat. Almost every time the fish will follow it out from beneath the pontoon and have a crack.

To target the slower moving species holding under and up against pontoons, such as bream and mangrove jack, an even simpler retrieve is used. A 'slow roll' is one of the most standard of retrieves. A parallel cast is imperative, then let the lure sink until it is about one metre beneath the pontoon and then slowly wind your lure past the face of the whole pontoon. Bream and jacks will normally shoot out and grab the lure, before darting back for cover.

So, important tips to remember while fishing the summer months include 'match the hatch'; matching colours and sizes of lures to the bait is very important when you have a tough bite. Secondly, fish light jigheads when you can; the more time in the strike zone, the better your chances are of catching some great fish. And finally, change your retrieves as it may mean the difference between catching and not catching. Fish on!





By Justin Willmer

Rolling Plastics for Bream

Flathead are my thing. I love stalking the shallows in search of bait and structure that may attract a flathead or two to the area. In recent times though I have been downsizing my plastics when the flathead are finicky and my bream captures have sky rocketed, so much so that I have now worked out the tides and techniques that work in my area and am regularly catching numbers of quality bream.

It all began with the arrival of the ZMan 2.5" Slim SwimZ, a paddle tail plastic with an under hooked tail design that gives it tonnes of tail action for such a small plastic. I tied one on when the bait was tiny and the flathead finicky and by the end of the session had landed over thirty flathead... and over thirty bream, without even targeting them!

I was fishing along a bank that was made up of mud, sections of sand and areas of broken weed beds. The technique that worked was a long cast, with the Slim SwimZ rigged on a 1/0 TT HeadlockZ Finesse jighead, allow the plastic to sink to the bottom, impart two hops to the lure using the rod tip and then slow roll (slow wind) the plastic back. Some bream just slammed the Slim SwimZ, while others would just tap the plastic. When the bream tap the plastic I continue the slow roll and the bream will tap, tap, tap, until it finds the hook and you feel the rod load. Just keep winding away from the fish until you feel the rod load.

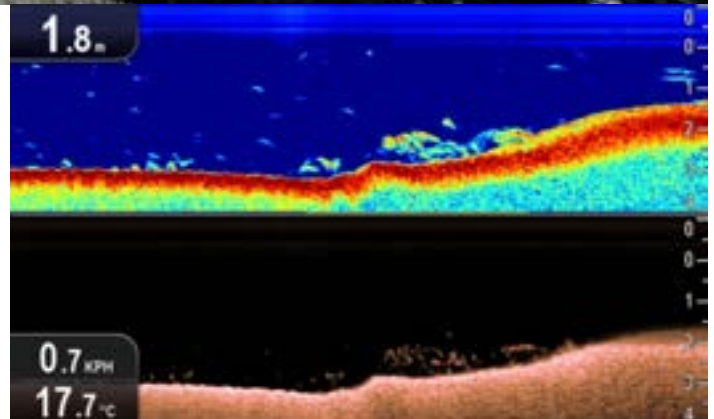


The Slim SwimZ has been producing numbers of both bream and flathead.



Keep an eye out for bait, structure and hollows on the flats.

From here I started targeting bream in areas where I had caught them in the past. Key things to look for on the flats include bait flicking or nervous (rippled) water on the surface created by nervous bait below the surface, along with structure that attracts bream such as rock or rubble, broken weed patches and deeper holes or depressions on the flat where bream can escape the current.



A long cast is important as it minimises spooking the fish. Cast over and past the target structure, allow the lure to sink to the bottom, give it a couple of twitches to excite the fish and then slow roll the lure over the target structure. I fish anything up to 1/4oz 1/0 TT HeadlockZ Finesse to get that additional casting distance and lifting the rod tip when you commence your retrieve can ensure the plastic isn't ploughing along the bottom... and if it is a flathead will probably eat it!

On the flats keep an eye out for dugong, turtles, dolphins and other wildlife.



My favourite time to hit the flats is on the last of the run in and then first few hours of the run out as the bream actively round up bait and feed across the flat before the water drains away and they are forced to hunt in the depths where they too may become food for larger predators. This timing is perfect as the higher periods of the tide can be spent chasing bream on the flats, with the second half of the run out my favoured time for moving off the flats to target flathead along the edges.

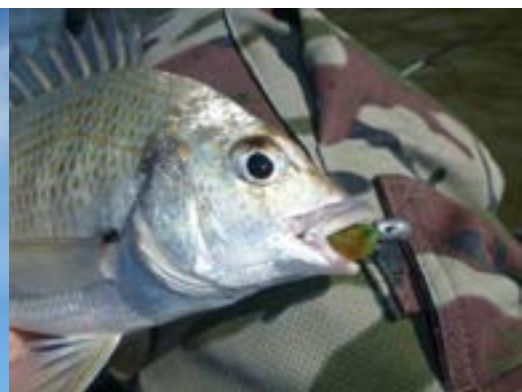
Scent has proven a winner when the bream bite is more finicky and especially when you get that initial tap, without any follow up taps or hook ups. A squirt of Mullet Pro-Cure Super Gel is my go-to and this scent combines the best of the laboratory amino acids, bite stimulants and UV enhancement with real ground bait, while also being super sticky so that you only have to apply a little every 20-30 casts. If you haven't tried scent give it a crack when the bite is tough.

The author's flathead and bream hunting vessel.

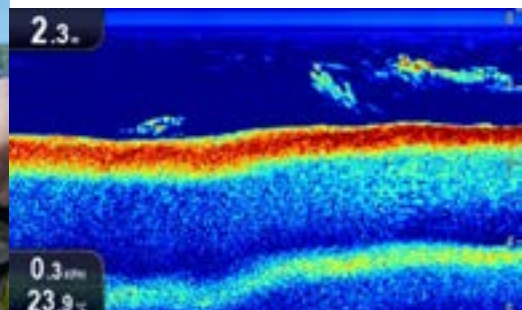


Other variables that can influence success include season, tide times and moon phases. A morning or late afternoon high to run out tide can produce awesome results and I believe it is partly attributed to the low light conditions, but also often due to less traffic on the water... once those fifty jet skis buzz through the area the bite can slow. In terms of moon phases my highest catch rates have come in the few days leading up to the full or new moon, with bigger fish and higher numbers in the cooler months, but don't sit around waiting for three days before the full moon in mid-winter to give it a crack as I have caught fish using this technique at all times of year and on all moon phases. If you are lucky enough to be on the water for these prime windows of time, then hang on!

Still plenty of flathead eating the Slim SwimZ.



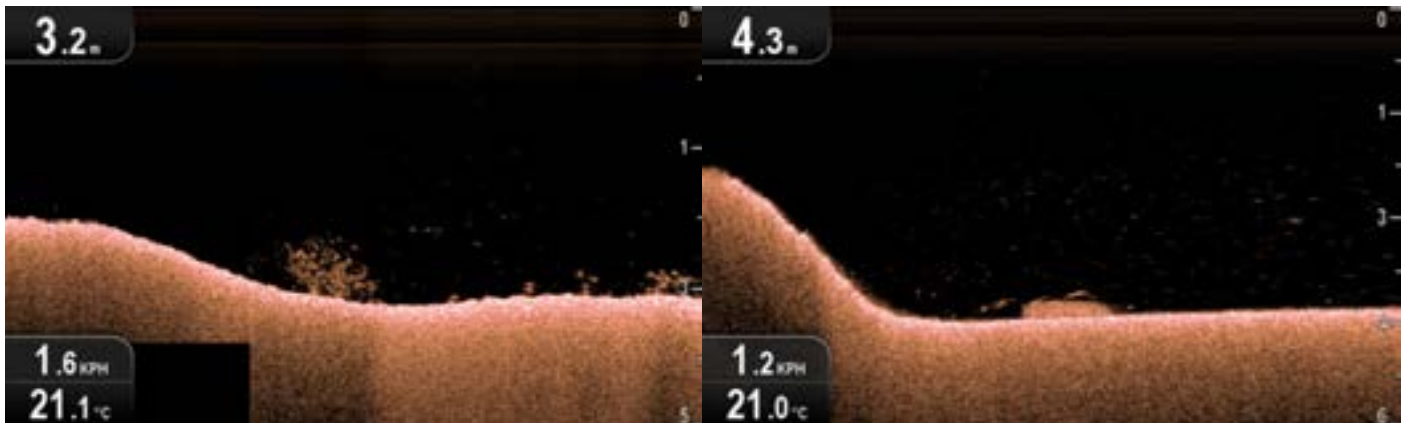
Even smaller bream inhale the little 2.5" Slim SwimZ.



Keep an eye on the sounder.

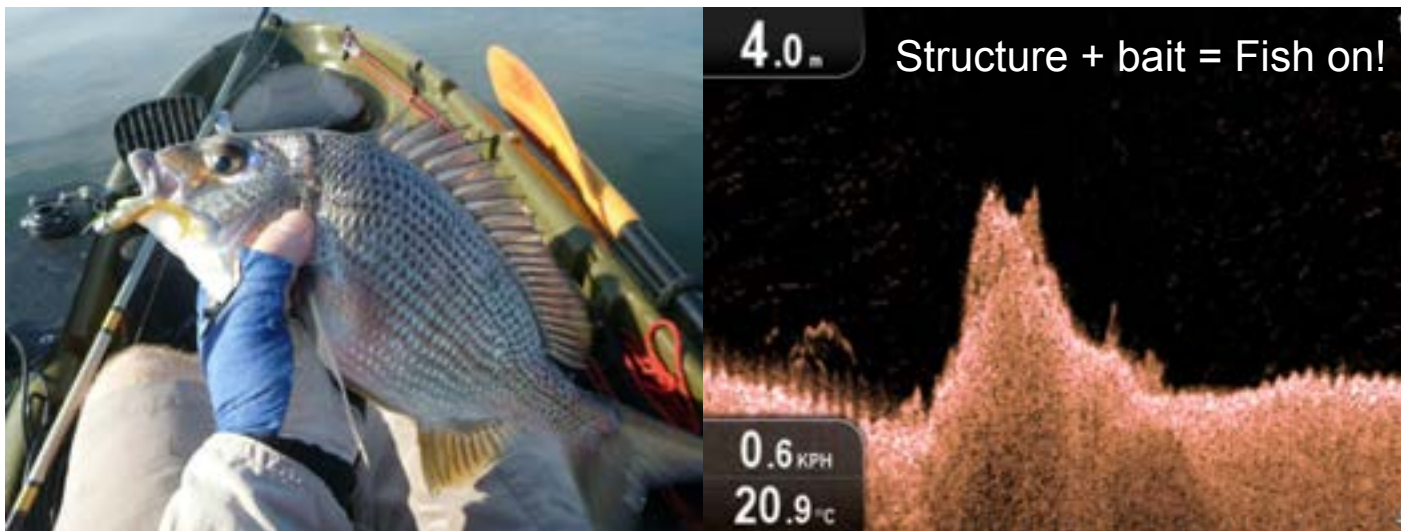


The time had come to get off the flats and take the little Slim SwimZ for an adventure in deeper water to see if it would produce results. Bream often school in the deeper holes around the mouths of rivers and estuaries, especially in the cooler months, but again I have caught them year round. I travel through these areas in the boat or kayak and keep an eye on the sounder for any sign of bait or fish. If there are no shows on the sounder I continue to explore further or move to another spot, but if there is fish or bait it's time to get a lure in there.



In deeper water keep an eye on the sounder for structure, bait & schools of fish, then position to cast over them and retrieve back with the current.





I position the boat or kayak up current of the shows on the sounder, throw a long cast up current and allow the plastic to sink to the bottom as I drift back. The plan is for the plastic to hit the bottom just before the shows on the sounder. Again the 1/4oz 1/0 HeadlockZ Finesse is my go-to jighead and it generally has enough weight to get the plastic to the bottom in up to six metres of water. Watch your line as it cuts a 'V' in the water surface as the plastic sinks, before going slack as the plastic reaches the bottom. A couple of hops will bring the plastic to life as it kicks off the bottom, followed by a slow roll close to the bottom, waiting for that slam or tap, tap, tap. An occasional pause will see the plastic touchdown on the bottom again before recommencing your retrieve.





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