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Angler: Aaron Papas

Species: Murray Cod

Lure: TT Lures FroggerZ Spinnerbait

Colour: Green Marsh



EXMOUTH FISHING

By Luke Ryan



There is a number of reasons why I choose to fish with ZMan soft plastics when travelling north; they have the best action, best colour range and they LAST! There is nothing worse than having to constantly replace a torn soft plastic when the bite is hot.

My crew and I have recently just returned from a great fishing trip to Exmouth, WA. The trip was mainly focused around marlin fishing and participating in one of the local game fishing club's billfish tournaments, however when booking the trip we made sure to book an extra couple of days to head out to the islands to throw some soft plastics around.



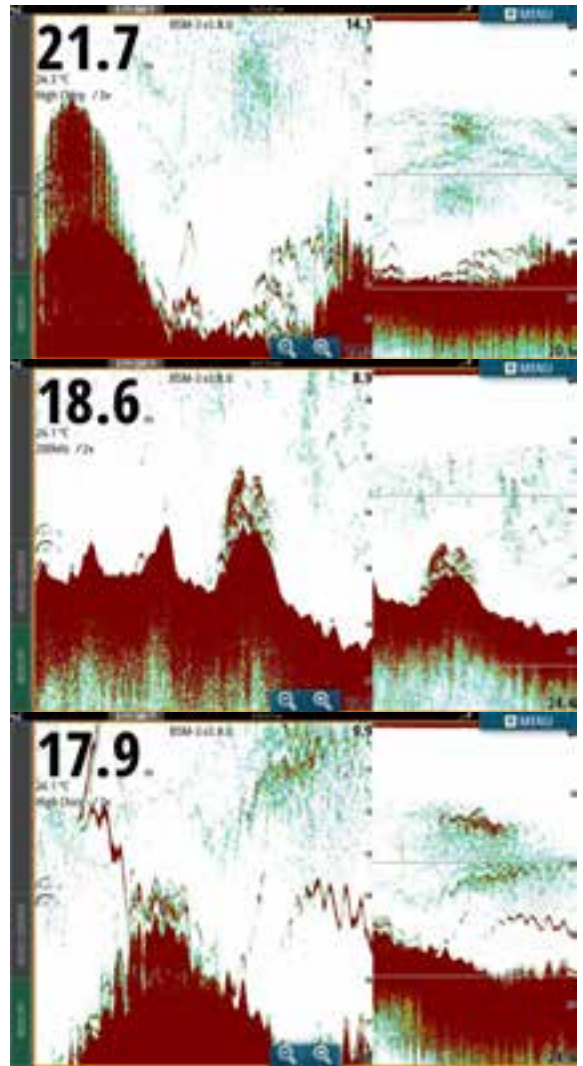
The shallow water plastic fishing in Exmouth is unbelievable and the list of species on offer is endless. The main target species for my crew and I, when we weren't bill fishing, were coral trout, coronation trout, Rankin cod and spangled emperor, just to name a few. The number of species that are available in Exmouth is crazy and you never really know what you are going to catch.



Most of the fishing is in relatively shallow water, around 15 to 30 metres, on a coral bottom, with plenty of structure and current for the fish to hide. Because the area we fish is so vast, with miles upon miles of awesome looking bottom, finding the correct bottom that holds fish is critical. I have found that when fishing the shallow water coral patches the fish tend to move around a lot, following the bait. I tend to mark a lot of spots as I drive and even though they might not have fish on them at the time, I place the mark. I can then come back at a different part of the tide in the hope of there being some quality fish on them.

Due to most of the ground we are fishing being quite shallow and the reef extremely sharp, it is very common for a fish to swim out from its ledge, smash your plastic and then drill you in the reef. I try to fish with a relatively tight drag and a decent size leader line. Generally I try to fish with 50lb-80lb leaders and even they get chewed up by the reef at times. On flatter ground, with not as much structure, I will drop the size of the leader to entice more bites.

Fishing with ZMan soft plastics is so simple because the ElaZtech material is so soft and flexible that it doesn't require as much action to be put into the lure from the rod tip. I tend to work the lures very subtly and find that I get more bites. I have had my deckhands tell me that they think I am fishing with bait, that's how little I work the ZMan plastics, however I normally find that if I work the plastic really hard with a lot of movement I get minimal bites.



A good sounder makes it possible to find prime structure, bait and quality fish like these.





The ZMan SwimmerZ doing the job on a variety of species.



7" Scented Jerk ShadZ were also effective.

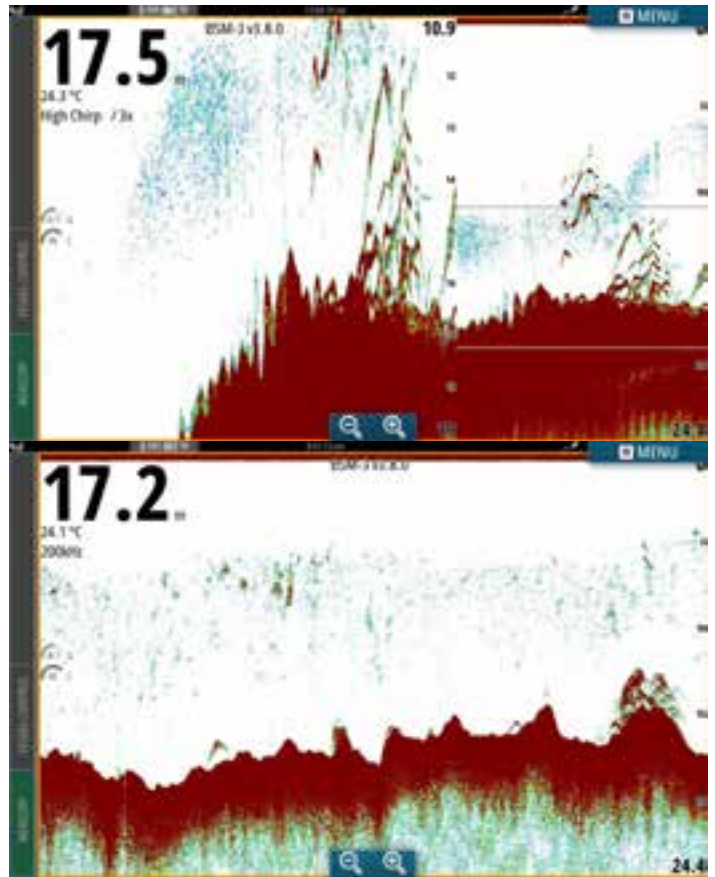


Yum!

My favourite model throughout the range has got to be the ZMan 6" SwimmerZ. It is hands down one of the best soft plastic lures I have used. They are super easy to rig onto a jighead, have a great action and they are the perfect size. Being 6" they are not too big for a small fish and not too small for a big fish. Due to the large tail on the lure I find that it actually slows the sink rate of your offering, be sure to choose the correct size jighead when using the SwimmerZ.

On this trip I managed to swing myself away from using the SwimmerZ all of the time and banged a couple fish on the 9" GrubZ and 7" Scented Jerk ShadZ. I nailed two really good fish on both of these soft plastics straight away. The 7" Scented Jerk ShadZ in Coconut Ice Glow colour didn't even make it to the bottom on the first drop, before I had a hungry rankin cod decide he was going to destroy it and try to bust me off in the reef. It wasn't his lucky day however and I managed to land him after a hard fight. Another big bonus from fishing the shallow water is how much harder the fish fight, especially on light tackle. The fish know where the safety of the reef is and they try all the tricks to get back in it.

I try to fish as light as possible to get the most feel and action from the lures. Generally the rods I fish with are rated 20-30lb, seven foot in length and matched to 3000-4000 size Daiwa reels. Being able to feel what your soft plastic is doing while under the water is a huge help. Because we are fishing in such shallow water, with a lot of structure, using light tackle has a big bonus of letting you feel what is going on with your lure on the bottom. I can actually feel the plastic bouncing over the reef and normally I can feel when I am about to get snagged on the reef before I actually do. A lot of the times prior to snagging I will release the tension on the line for a second and try to hop the plastic over the obstruction. Normally it tends to work well, while other times I get snagged and have to break the plastic off.



The ZMan 9" GrubZ also got a run on this trip.



Another thing that helps is crushing the barbs on the jighead. Not only does it help with getting unhooked from the reef but it also helps when releasing fish. I make it a point to my mates, when fishing on my boat, especially on trips up north, that any hook that goes in the water **MUST** be barbless. The last thing I want is to call a day short due to the fact that somebody has a hook stuck in them.



Trevally are good fun and were also on the chew.

On the couple of spare days we had while in Exmouth, for some shallow water soft plastic fishing, we had an absolute ball. We caught some great fish and lost a minimal amount of gear. In fact I still have one of the 6" SwimmerZ left after catching multiple fish, that I will keep for the next trip. Now to book my next fishing holiday!

Luke Ryan



Luke with another quality reefy and another victim of the 9" GrubZ.

COD

ON!



By Aaron Papas

When a fishing mate suggested we go and spend a few days chasing Murray cod, I must admit I was a little more than excited at the proposition, having never targeting them before. Being based in Sydney and predominantly chasing jewfish (mulloway) on lures, I found myself immediately wondering what these Aussie icons would offer as a sportfish and how they would compare to my normal saltwater quarry.

Like many anglers out there, Murray cod were a must on my bucket list and have an obvious attraction, with their truly giant growth potential and ferocious appetite for devouring lures!

With a bit of research, a destination was selected and now all that was left to do was visit the local tackle store and see what I could find in the way of cod lures. Through research on social media, I knew most people were using various spinnerbaits and surface lures and that cod definitely had a preference for busy lures that created a lot of disturbance and vibration through the water.

Having never fished for them before I found myself scanning the aisle of the tackle store wondering what might help me in my quest to catch my first cod. Almost immediately I spotted the TT FroggerZ Jnr and Snr spinnerbaits staring back at me and I was instantly drawn to them. What stood out to me was that the lure had double Colorado blades and an extremely lifelike frog as a trailer that just looked like an awesome representation of what a Murray cod would consume in the wild. The twin blades would create activity and the frog trailer would recreate one of the cod's favourite prey items.





The FroggerZ spinnerbaits proved effective on cod of all sizes.

I also stocked up on the TT HD (heavy duty) Jig Spinner in the medium frame size, with plans to use varying ZMan baitfish profile lures as trailers, as an alternative when not throwing the FroggerZ.

When selecting lures for any type of fishing and in particular when fishing for a species you have never caught, I think confidence in the lure you have chosen is one of the most important factors in the trip being a successful one and achieving what you have set out to do. While cod are not exactly classed as a fussy species I was still convinced that closely representing their natural prey would be my best bet at luring my first cod and would ensure that if my lure crossed paths with any fish it would get crunched! My internet research prior to this trip indicated that cod, especially larger cod, were sometimes regarded as a 'fish of 1000 casts' but I felt confident in my lure selection and could not wait to throw them into some tight structure that a cod may be holding in.

So that being said, I loaded up on some FroggerZ in both Jnr and Snr sizes, in multiple colours and started day dreaming about what my first crack at this Aussie icon would be like and whether we would be successful. After a long drive we reached our destination and set out looking for likely cod hangouts along a rocky tree-lined bank, far from the usual structure that I fish in Sydney Harbour and the Hawkesbury River.

The anticipation was killing me as I tied on a FroggerZ Jnr in Green Tree colour and started throwing it at some likely looking boulders that flowed off the bank and into some deeper water. My technique was a simple one; allow the FroggerZ to sink close to the river bed and then begin a slow roll just prior to it making contact with the bottom. I also threw in an occasional small twitch, to create variation in the retrieve, although this was much subtler than what I would usually do when saltwater luring. It took all of about three casts before my FroggerZ was stopped dead in its tracks with a violent thud! Cod hit hard and the take is something that I'm sure adds to the fascination that so many anglers have with this fish.



ZMan 9" GrubZ trailer in action.

A short fight ensued and my first Murray cod, of around 60cm, was slid up the bank. Immediately wanting more we continued on our way, scanning the banks for suitable structure to cast at. We continued to find fish, especially when focusing our casts at rocks and timber that flowed off the banks and into deeper water. This is where most of the bites came from and I'm sure cod spend a large part of their time holding in such locations as opposed to open water.



The author with a cod on the FroggerZ Jnr. Spinnerbait.



Cameron with a quality fish on a TT FroggerZ Snr. Spinnerbait.

One interesting fact is that three of the larger fish that we landed, at 88cm, 84cm and 75cm, all seemed to come from casting out into seemingly deeper water, without any obvious structure to cast at, once we had exhausted some of the snags closer to shore. A quick scan using polarised glasses however revealed many of the larger logs and rocks actually stretched out further into open water than what we could initially see. It definitely pays to closely observe these somewhat hidden structures, especially as they were a bigger fish producer for us. What is visible from the bank often leads to a larger hidden cod structure in deeper water and once aware of this our catch rate picked up considerably as we focused our casts at any structure that looked like it extended further away from the bank, out into deeper water.

After both catching good numbers of cod on Jnr and Snr FroggerZ we started to throw some ZMan 5" Grass KickerZ in Houdini colour, rigged with 1/2oz 6/0 TT Headlockz HD jigheads and attached to a Medium Frame HD Jig Spinner for extra visibility in the water. These were a great gudgeon style representation and we quickly found the cod also loved this lure combination, with the Jig Spinner addition. We had great success using these, rounding off the trip with a few fish in the 70cm range and both landing double digit figures of fish over the trip.



The TT Tornado spinnerbait is also a cod favourite.

The highlight of the three day trip for me was sight casting to a larger cod that had chased something in closer to shore, when I spotted it in the distance using polarised sunglasses. I nervously cast a FroggerZ Jnr close to where I saw the cod and it swiftly turned and crunched it! I had heard that cod sometimes hit lures close to shore during the retrieve, but was amazed by this visual lure take from this decent size fish at 88cm. A tail slap on the surface in protest, a short fight and I had my best cod for the trip resting in the water for a few photos before release.



The author admires a nice cod prior to release.



ZMan 5" Grass KickerZ and a TT Jig Spinner HD doing the job for the author.

A few things I learnt from the trip include, cod are suckers for Froggerz and active spinnerbaits, along with any larger profile lures like a Grass KickerZ or ZMan 4" DieZel MinnowZ, attached to a HD Jig Spinner for extra vibration through the water. We also tried some variation, including trailers (soft plastics attached to the spinnerbait hooks) on the FroggerZ Snr and the ZMan 9" GrubZ in Pearl colour was a standout trailer on our spinnerbaits.

When looking for suitable casting locations aim your casts at structure and cover that extends from the bank into deeper water. This is where the cod will be sitting, particularly during the daylight hours. Slow roll your spinnerbait past likely snags and cover... and hang on! We did use relatively light spin gear on this trip, with rods in the 6-12lb range and 3000 size reels loaded with 15lb mainline. After getting the cod bug I will invest in a suitable baitcast setup for future trips, for ease in throwing bulky lures, although we both found the spin gear worked fine for us.



Another victim of the ZMan 9" GrubZ trailer.

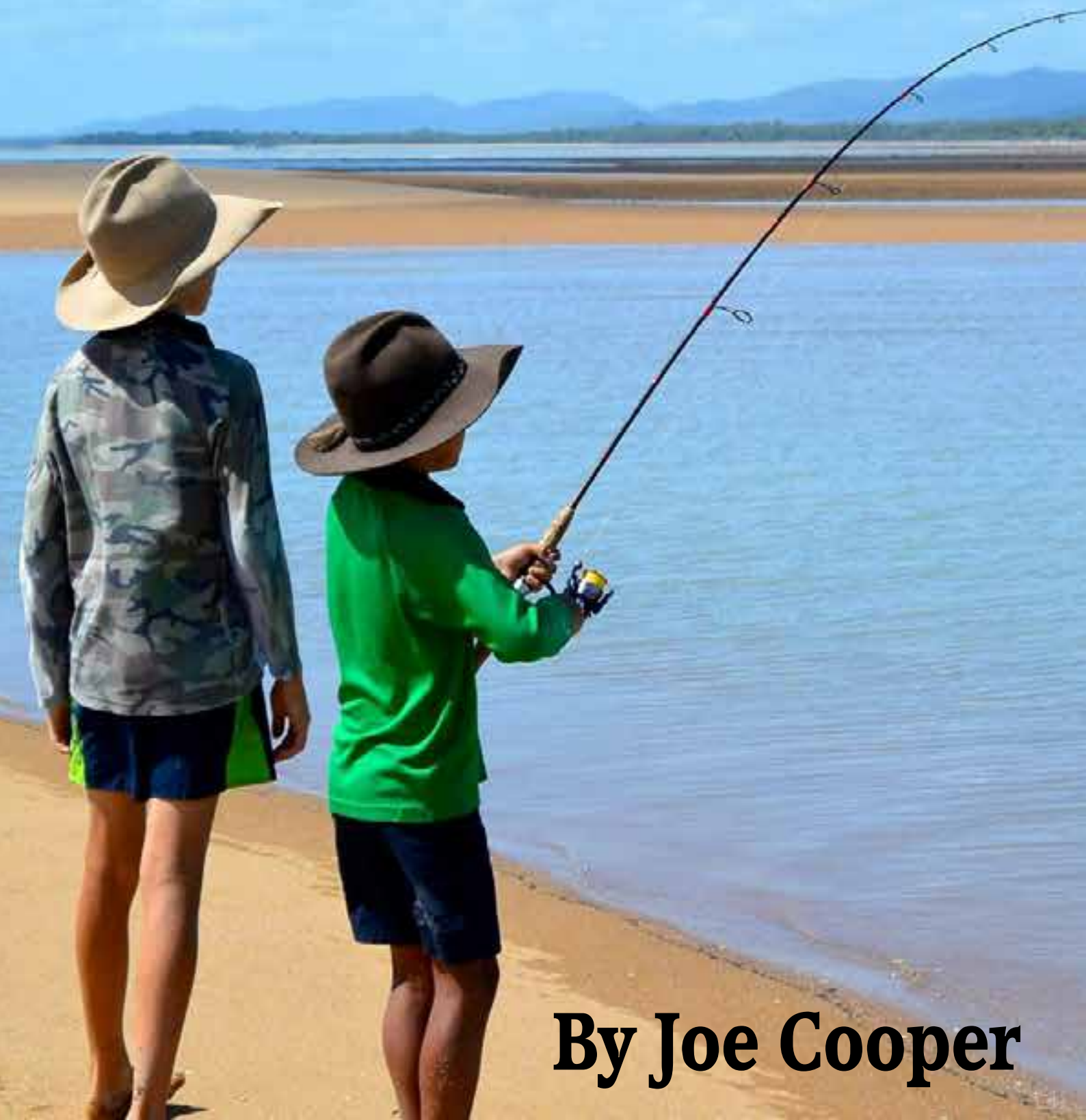
So if like me you are thinking of a summer cod trip, or potentially targeting cod for the first time, load up on some FroggerZ and Jig Spinners to attach to your ZMans and give it a go! These are a true bucket list fish and better yet, they love eating lures!



A nice cod with a gob full of FroggerZ and 9" GrubZ trailer.

BIVOUAC BOYS

ADDICTION



By Joe Cooper

Addicted, obsessed, fanatical, these are a few of the words I would use to describe the Bivouac Boyz feelings towards fishing and I must admit some of my most enjoyable experiences have been as their guide, skipper, photographer and most of all, father. I often talk to other fathers who tell me that it is too hard for them to take their kids fishing and I don't think that they realize what they are missing out on. I have always loved fishing, but the feeling I get watching my boys faces when they catch a whopper is unbelievable. I am addicted to the thrill of watching my boys fish. It's not easy at the start, but if you spend the time teaching your kids how to fish, the time that you can then spend together on the water is priceless.

Keeping kids busy is very important if you want your kids to enjoy fishing. The best way to do this is of course to find fish, which sometimes is easier said than done. We nearly always lure fish, I find that lure fishing keeps the kids busy, and when they were younger and couldn't tie their own knots it kept me very busy too. When the boys were younger I didn't fish, it was nearly impossible. It is amazing how quick things change though, if you put the time in early and let them make mistakes, the improvement in their casting is amazing and they will be asking you if they can practice at home. The boys have worn out a lot of braid at home casting into a bucket.



I believe that one of the most important things to consider when looking to get kids into fishing is using the right gear. I always say that you should use the best gear you can afford. I learnt very early that while you might get away with a cheap rod and reel, you will not get away with cheap line. I get so frustrated watching kids fish with the little cheap rods with the light mono line that has so much memory that knots up all the time and it breaks when they get a decent fish. Braid is by far the best for kids

Another thing that I think a lot of people are unaware of is how good plastics are for kids. I still remember some nightmare sessions with my boys fishing with hard bodies. There is nothing worse than a fish going nuts in the bottom of the boat or kayak swinging trebles in every direction, when you have kids with you. Jigheads are much safer, only having one hook to worry about and it is also much safer and easier to unhook the fish. With three kids luring at once in our boat you can imagine there are times that I get a bit nervous, even now, and I very rarely let more than one of the boys use a hard body at one time.



Josh



Cody



Mitch



The smiles tell the story.



By far the best lure for kids is a plastic rigged on a TT Lures SnakelockZ weedless jighead. They are very forgiving of bad casts and safer, as you can bury the point of the hook into the plastics. My boys often get friends over for sleep overs and when they go fishing the SnakelockZ always come out. Our favourite plastic is definitely the ZMan 3" MinnowZ and the boys can nearly name every colour in the collection. In the early days we tried some different plastics, but when we were introduced to the ZMan range we have never used anything else.

I have always let the boys pick their own lures and jigheads. When they catch a fish on a lure they have picked themselves it gives them a bit of motivation to learn about lures and how they work. I have often been proven wrong when I offered my opinion on their lure choice and have learnt to keep my mouth shut to avoid being made a fool of. I also taught the boys very early to tie their own knots. I have found that the sooner that they can do things on their own, the more they enjoy fishing.



A river somewhere...

It is amazing how many great people we have met while fishing and how many are more than happy to give you a few tips, especially if you are fishing with kids. We have had people take us on trips or even let us tag along behind them in our boat to some of their spots. I always tell my boys to look for people that are catching fish then try to copy what they are doing. A very good way to do this is by reading articles online or in magazines. We have been very lucky to have met some very good fisherman that have been keen to teach us a few things about soft plastic fishing.

I think that there is a primal instinct in me that loves the thrill of teaching my boys to fish. When we do keep a feed of fish the boys definitely get a sense of pride in cooking something that they have caught and often the boys have argued about who caught the one we are having for dinner. The boys have even sacked me from filleting duties and fillet their own fish. When the boys were younger they always wanted to keep every fish they caught so they could show others their catch. I counteracted this by buying a good waterproof camera and I believe a camera is an awesome bit of fishing gear when fishing with kids. I am not looking forward to the day that they do not need me... although I am pretty safe for a while as Josh my oldest son, at 12, still has a few years before he can get his boat license.



Just one more cast...



NEW GEAR

BAIT BINDERZ #2615

The ultimate storage solution for your ZMan soft plastics, allowing you to find the model and colour you're after in seconds. The ZMan Bait BinderZ features nickel plated, corrosion resistant rings that have been spaced to fit the reinforced, pre-punched holes in the bottom of standard size ZMan packets. Store your ZMan plastics in their original packs, away from other plastics. No space taken up by plastic sleeves and no double handling opening sleeves to get packets out or leaving loose packets where they can blow out of the boat. Quick, simple and more time for fishing.



Constructed from 500 denier nylon for durability, embroidered with the ZMan logo and featuring a carry handle for easy transport and securing to your vessel, the Bait BinderZ will hold 10-15 packets of ZMan plastics, depending on model. Grab one with your favourites in for a session on the water, or keep different models in different BinderZ for easy access. Fish on!

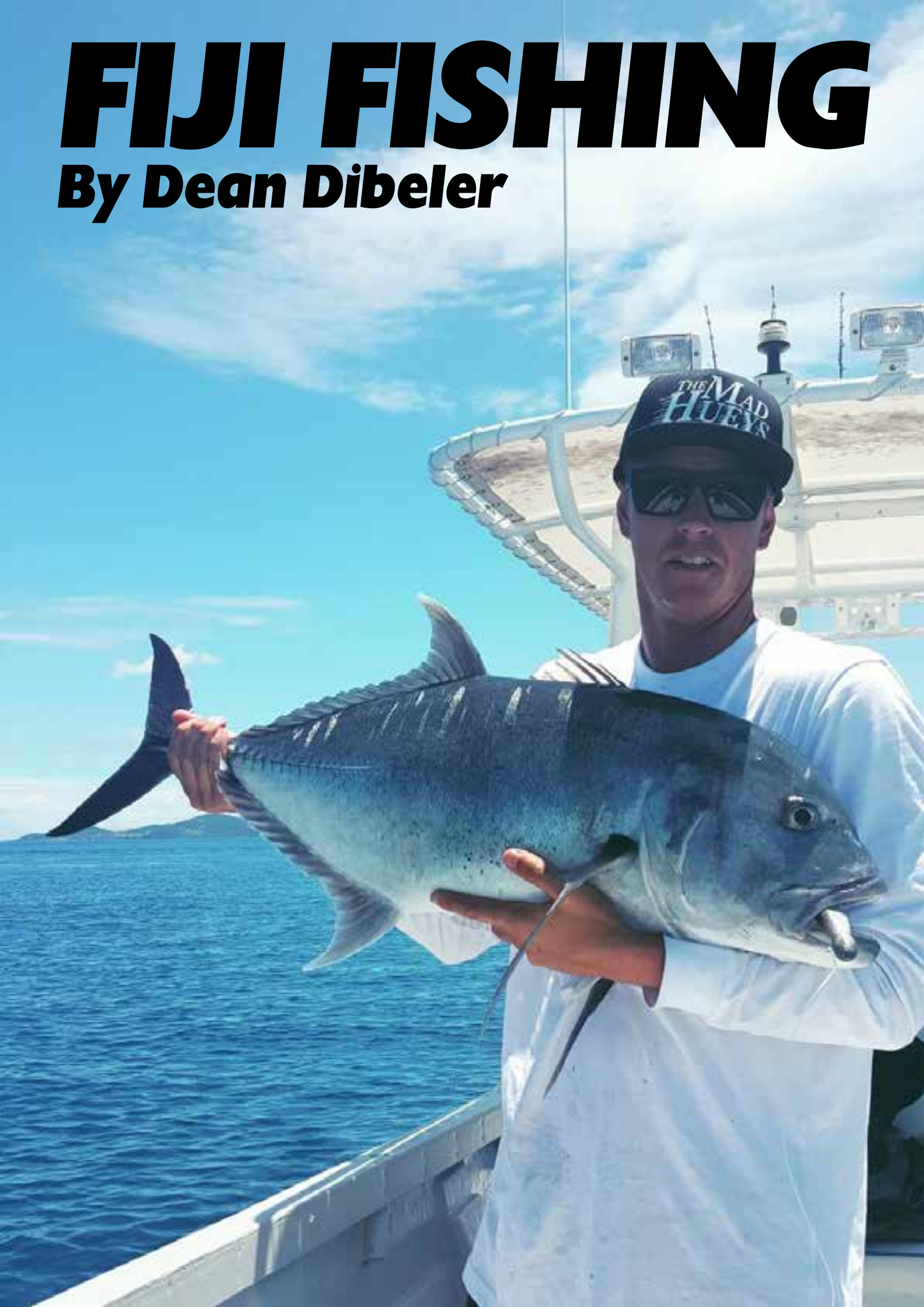


A couple of Bait BinderZ loaded for the session, A Moncross Walker Box double-sided box loaded with jigheads and you are ready for any adventure!



FIJI FISHING

By Dean Dibeler



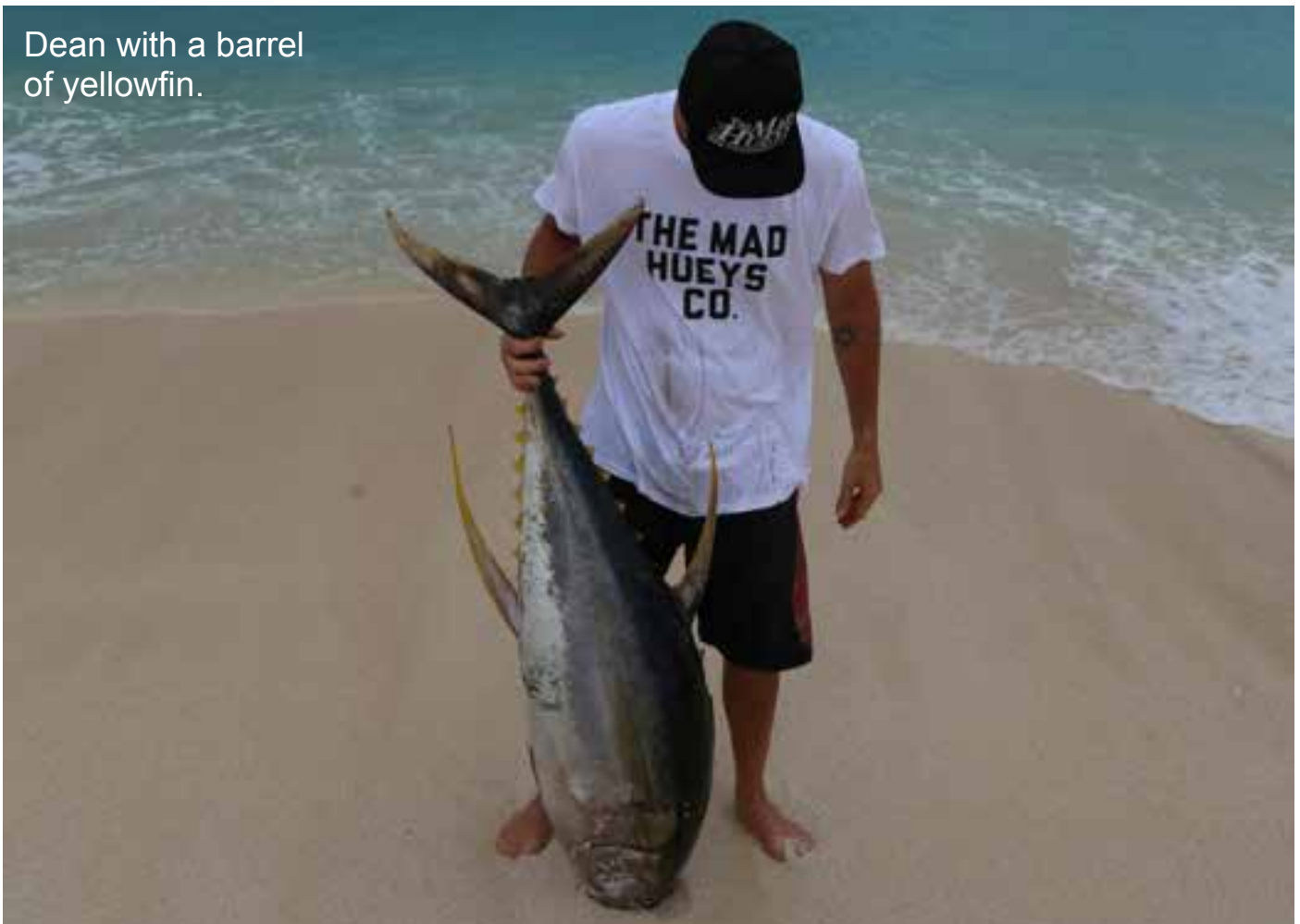
Dean shares with us his log from a recent Fiji adventure...

After flying from Barrow to Perth, Perth to Melbourne and then lastly Melbourne to Nadi, I finally arrived in Fiji completely exhausted. I made it to the island by around 0900 had a catch up with Scotty the resort owner and my wife who had arrived a week earlier, then I was off for a little nap. The little nap went a bit longer than expected and day one was pretty much over... I woke for dinner and then went back to bed.

After all the sleep I had caught up on I was back up and ready to go. The swell had arrived with all breaks working, so I grabbed a board and ducked off to Pools for a couple of waves. On my return to the island Scotty had heard a report of some large yellowfin caught to the south, so we jumped in the Lunasea and took off. After looking and looking we found some birds working and set the spread.

On the first pass both corner rods buckled over, one drag began to scream, while the other snapped off with a crack, sending the line flying back into the boat. We ended up landing the fish and it was a PB for me at 42Kg. We trolled around for another two hours and ended up catching ten of the biggest skip jack we had ever seen.

Dean with a barrel of yellowfin.



Missed it by that much...



Woke to rain and wind gusting to 50 knots, so no activities today apart from a boat from a neighbouring resort capsizing, a rescue mission and six extra people spending a night on Namotu.

The weather had passed and had left behind some swell, however I had two guests keen for fishing so off we went. The plan was to down rig a live scad for a mackerel. The mackerel around these parts are a lot different than the fish at home, they just don't eat lures consistently. A live scad on the other hand they just can't resist. The scad was caught rigged and sent back into the water and slowly trolled for around 10-15 minutes before it was eaten. The drag began to sing but unfortunately the mackerel got off the hook before we got a look at it.

With the incoming tide I took the guys to a little spot to throw some lures for GT's and the current was good, with a patch of bait on the surface. We managed a few strikes but they unfortunately missed the hooks and then the storm rolled in, sending us back to the island.

Solo fishing today, rose early and headed to an old spot that holds a few trout and other tasty reef fish, as the tide was perfect to bounce a few ZMans. With no working sounder it took a little longer than usual to find them but I landed a couple of trout, one GT and two walu (mackerel) on the way home. Not a bad morning and then surfed until dark.

The boys from Hawaii, Nick & Manu, were finally surfed out and decided to fish. We dragged a couple of baits around the reef edge that got chomped in half but failed to hook, before the tide turned and Nick was keen to do some casting. We motored over to a favourite reef edge where Nick unleashed, third cast in he landed a nice Queenfish and then very next cast got busted up into the reef by something quite large, probably a GT. The Lunasea fished wide in the afternoon, bringing in two solid Mahi and I fished the reef with Aussie bloke Dane, landing a 17kg walu.

Time for some toothies.



The Trevs loved the big ZMan plastics.



Had a sleep in this morning, took a couple guys spearfishing for something different and we had a few walu come into the flasher, just couldn't close the gap. We moved locations and each shot a couple reef fish for some bar snacks. Surfing in the arvo until dark again... waves were pumping!

Fished solo for a quick morning session as it was change over day for the guests and had to say goodbye to the new friends I had made and greet the new guests coming in. Surfing Wilkes from lunch until 4pm and then took a couple guys from LA fishing in the afternoon and ended up with a barracuda.

Lades fishing comp was on and my wife Gabi won it last year and was ready to defend the title. We took the game boat south to give us a downwind run, as the trades were forecast to blow that afternoon. We had a double hook up on mahi with both Gabi & Penny boating fish.

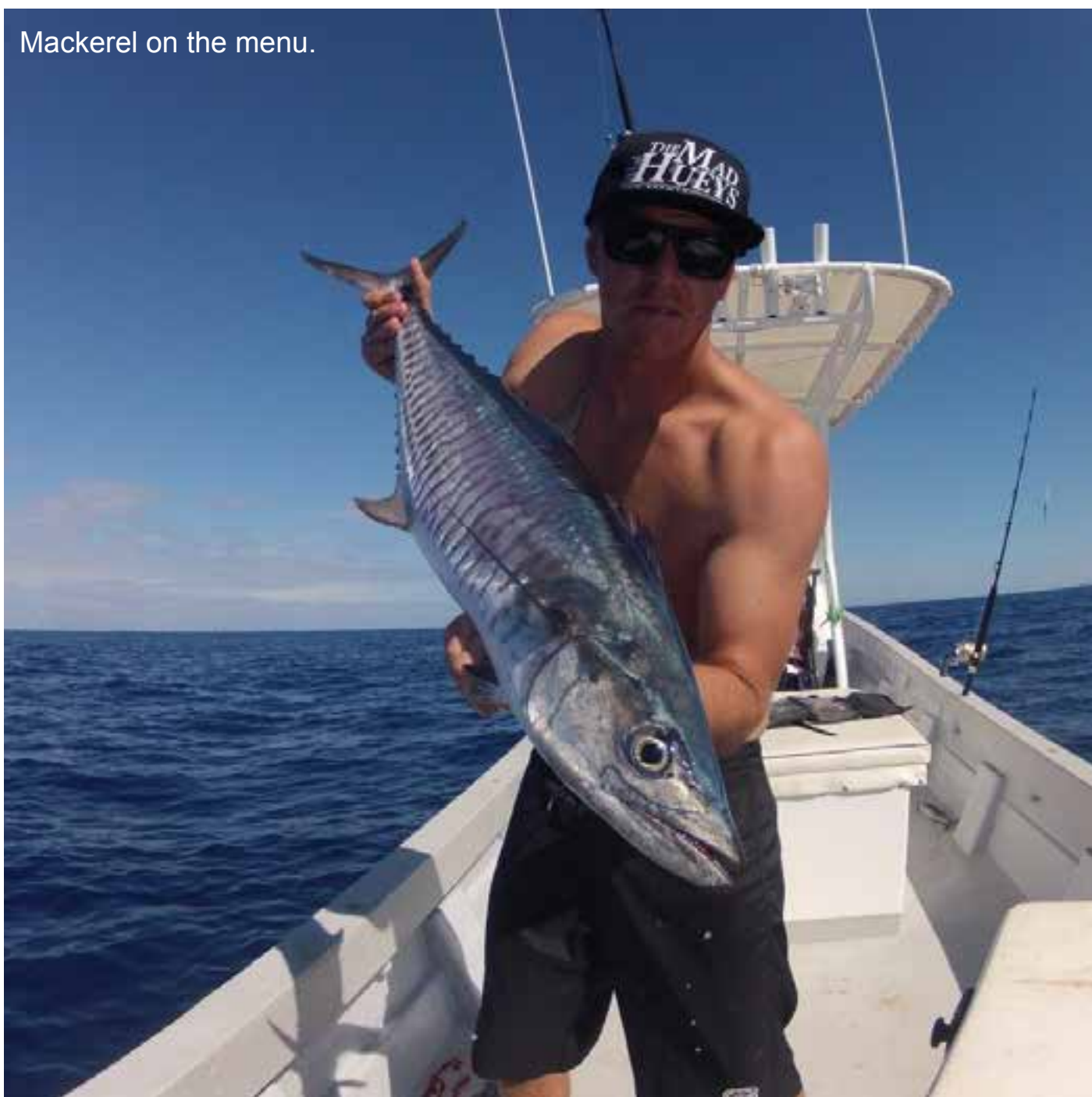
The rest of the day was pretty quiet, until we stumbled across a big clump of bamboo. As we trolled past the resident mahi swam out into the spread, crashing the lures but failing to hook up. We spent the rest of our allocated fishing time circling the bamboo, watching the mahi and hoping to get another strike. The fish had wised up though and it was time to head back for the weigh in.

At the weight in Penny`s fish went 8.8kg and Gabi`s 10.8kg. Fortunately Gabi`s fish was the only one in the comp caught on 10kg line, giving her a couple of extra points and just enough to take out the win once again, bringing the pink marlin trophy back to Namotu once again.

Had a sleep in today... was a little dusty after the comp. Pulled things together for a fun surf until the wind came in and I kited all afternoon. No fishing today.

Bobby was super keen to catch a GT so I took him around to a few spots, raised a few fish, but sadly failed to hook up. We dropped down a couple of ZMan 8" StreakZ XL for a couple of fish, but nothing huge.

Mackerel on the menu.



Fiji is an awesome adventure and it throws up a myriad of fish species.



Surfed some fun waves at Wilkes this morning. Dived with Mike at Tavi Rights and saw bait everywhere and several good fish including green jobfish, mu, walu and two huge wrasse. Neither of us pulled the trigger. The current started to increase and I broke a fin, forcing me back to the boat and as we sat having a chat and packing our gear a walu launched straight out of the water, six feet in the air, right next to us... as if to give us the finger. Fished wide looking for birds / tuna in the afternoon for a donut and then moved back to the reef caught some bait for the next morning.

Nothing but tackle failure this morning... don't even want to talk about it, followed by a windy arvo kite session where I ripped a guest's kite into two... sorry Gordo. So not my best day on Namotu that's for sure.

Last day consisted of a quick morning surf, then packed up, paid my bar tab and said my goodbyes. Thanks Again to Namotu for all of the waves, fish and fun.

SLIM SWIMZ

VERSATILITY



By Dane Radosevic

The ZMan 2.5" Slim SwimZ have been a staple soft plastic presentation in my tackle box since they were introduced to the market. A very realistic, small bait fish presentation, with a long slender body profile, imitating many Australian bait fish, such as whitebait and rain bait in the saltwater or gudgeons and smelt in the freshwater.

The very soft and supple 10X Tough ElaZtech material, from which the ZMan range of soft plastics is produced, makes the Slim SwimZ the ultimate finesse soft plastic presentation and I have had great success using them in the Australian bass fishing tournament circuit. Fishing these high-pressured events really puts both the angler and gear to the test and it is a situation where only the best quality products will perform time and time again. After securing multiple top five positions, Bassnation Rookie of the Year and Angler of the Year titles, whilst using this soft plastic, you can bet that I will have one tied on at all times.

One special feature that the Slim SwimZ has over its competitors is its action and in turn the many different ways in which it can be fished. When I first used this plastic I instantly noticed two distinct features to its action that really had me excited. Most plastics will generally have a tight tail action with minimal body roll or a large body roll with minimal tail action, however the Slim SwimZ has both. Using various retrieval techniques the Slim SwimZ has a tight body roll / shimmy, whilst still possessing an erratic tail action, creating a very enticing bait.



Game on!



Fish on!



At the scales.



Dane with a solid bass.



There are three different rigging options that I tend to vary when targeting bass specifically, all of which serve a particular purpose and are thrown in certain situations.

The first and my personal favourite is the finesse plastic rig, essentially a Slim SwimZ rigged on a TT DemonZ jig head, with colour, weight and hook size matched according to the scenario. This is a very realistic and subtle presentation and it is great for fishing over pressured or shut down fish. My ideal time to bring this lure out is in the early mornings or late afternoons, when there is still shade on the water and the fish are feeding up tight to the edges. Preferably I like to find a nice weed bed, coinciding with a point or bay and fish my lure right up in the weed.

The retrieval method and staying in contact with your lure is very important. Generally I will cast the lure right up into the weed and allow it to sink down before giving it a few short sharp rips of the rod tip. These rips allow the lure to break free of the weed, before going into the retrieve of a slow roll. I will then proceed to give the lure short sharp shakes, again using the tip of the rod every 8-10 winds, creating the impression of a fleeing or distressed baitfish. You will come into contact with a lot of weed whilst performing this technique and believe it or not, the more you are hitting the weed and ripping it through the better as this draws their attention, triggering the fish to bite and more often than not you will get crunched just as your plastic breaks free of the weed.

The DemonZ and Slim SwimZ, one of Dane's go-to combos.



The flash and vibration of the TT Rev Head drawing the bite.



The second method of rigging the Slim SwimZ involves presenting it on a TT Rev Head, which is a jig head with a blade attached to the underside of the head. I find this to be very successful in the discoloured waters found in some of our river systems and dams. I like to fish this lure around sunken grass as I have found this to be where shrimp can be found in greater numbers. As usual, find the bait source and essentially find the fish, it's pretty standard. In this situation I like the Slim SwimZ / Rev Head combination as it is a small and rather subtle profile.

There are two ways I like to fish this lure; either keep it simple with a dead slow roll or fish it using the method explained previously, thus causing the blade to jitter and stop, possibly mimicking a fleeing shrimp. Remember also in tidal waters it is important to fish with the current for a more natural presentation. By positioning yourself parallel to the bank and casting up current the lure not only presents more naturally, but at this angle it also keeps your lure in the strike zone for longer.



Jig Spinners are another bladed option that creates flash, vibration and a more weedless presentation.



Slim SwimZ Bassin'



The third and final rigging method is with the addition of a Jig Spinner, which is a wire arm with a single Colorado blade attached that is designed to clip onto the jig head rigged with a plastic. This presentation I tend to use a lot more when searching for fish and trying to entice a reaction bite. I also employ this technique when I know the fish are going to be very aggressive and fired up, especially during the warmer months.

This lure presentation is very successful in both river and dam situations and is fished with a simple slow wind retrieve. A simple tip that pays dividends is to know the countdown rate of your lure, from when it hits the surface to when it lands on the bottom. By paying close attention to your sounder, pin pointing the depth at which the fish are suspending and knowing your lures sink rate, you can effectively work out when to start your retrieve after the lure has hit the water, ensuring that it is in the strike zone.

When fishing any of these lure presentations I like to enhance them with a little Pro-Cure Super Gel Scent. In the dams I tend to favour Garlic Plus and Squid flavours, while in the rivers I like to mix it up between Shrimp and Night Crawler flavours. This gives me that added confidence that my presentation is as realistic as possible, not only visually, and if I get a short strike the scent may entice the fish to come back for a second shot at the lure. Using scent can also help to mask any unwanted contaminants such as sunscreen or fuel that may have been on your hands prior to rigging your lure, as these will drastically impact your results.

Cheers, Dane



Dane with a couple of healthy bass.



Many of these techniques are also effective on yellowbelly.



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BUCKET LIST COD



By Rodney Vardy

For many Aussie anglers, their fishing addiction is the mighty Murray Cod. It is a truly iconic species that grows to gargantuan proportions and has a reputation as a hard hitting predator that will eat anything that will fit in its mouth!

I have watched videos of massive surface hits and read many magazine articles, but I have never had the opportunity to pit myself against *Maccullochella peelii*, so when a mate recently put the call out to see if anyone was keen to join him on a cod trip, I was one of the first to raise my hand. After weeks of planning, purchasing, packing and practice casting in the park, we headed off for a five hour road trip, finding our way to Ben Falls Retreat.

Upon our arrival we didn't waste any time and were on the river before the dust had settled on the rough bush track that we had followed in. My goal was modest and simple... catch my first Murray cod.

After a couple of fruitless hours of slogging through the bush and casting, I found myself getting anxious. Surely I had not come all of this way, bought all of this gear and gone to such lengths, only to find that the fish are shut down? What am I doing wrong? Too fast, too slow, wrong lure?



Ben Falls tackle prep session. Preparation is often the key.



The author hits the park so that those casts are on the money.



A selection of the author's weapons for the trip.

Ben Falls cod live here...



A few deep breaths put those thoughts to bed and I reminded myself that this was just the first afternoon of three days. There would be plenty of opportunities to come. With those calming thoughts in mind, I relaxed and just enjoyed being in the moment. It really was a spectacular place, with wallabies, goats, lizards and birdlife galore to keep us company.

I fired a cast across the river into an alcove of rock that created a small back eddy away from the main river flow. It was my second such cast, but this one landed a little tighter to the rock edge. I started the long retrieve, just like 100's before, but within a few twitches the water erupted and the lure disappeared!

In disbelief, I struck and started winding. Having never before experienced a Murray cod surface strike first hand, I was unsure how big the fish was and not wanting to take any chances I had the drag done up similar to jack fishing... tight! Before I had a chance to think past the exhilaration of the hit, I felt the fish go deep and make its way into some structure.

The fish was definitely still on, but no amount of pulling was bringing it closer to me. Desperate to not lose my first opportunity of the trip, I moved up the bank to change the angle... to no avail. My mate, who was fishing not far away, provided some sage advice and suggested that I let the drag off. I took this advice and within moments I felt the fish take line and start to swim out.

Allowing it a second or two to get free of the snag, I then tightened up the drag and worked it further away from the structure. As the fish came to the surface in the shallows I was ecstatic to see my first ever Murray cod! Although not a big fish, it had taken me under some submerged structure and then into a weedy bank.

The lure and fish were covered in weed and the leader was noticeably chafed from contact with the branches or rocks... but I had my prize! After a few quick pics, I set it on its way.

With shaking hands and a smile that would stay in place for hours to come, I kept casting, keen now to add to my tally of one.



A Ben Falls cod on the Bagley Rattlin' Finger Mullet... Boof!

For the rest of the day and into the night, I threw cast after cast with lures many and varied, but could not get a fish to find the hooks. As darkness fell the hits started coming but the fish seemed to be teasing us and not committing fully to the attack. Within our group we had varying levels of success on the first day and our most successful angler shared his secret later that night. He had taken some advice from reading the visitors log. A previous guest had recommended slow rolling paddle tail plastics if the bite was slow, and it worked a treat.

Early the next morning we all hit the water again and can you guess what I had tied on? A TT Lures ChinlockZ SWS jighead, rigged with a 4" ZMan SwimmerZ! I also continued to cast the Bagley Rattlin' Finger Mullet with one outfit but could not repeat the previous day's heroics and as the sun started to get higher I concentrated more effort into the SwimmerZ.

Fishing a pool, not far from the site of my previous success, I was slow rolling the lure over some submerged boulders and into deeper water mid pool, when I received a small tap on the lure and watched a shadow follow my lure into the shallows... before turning away at the last minute.



The view to and from the cabin.



Bagley and ZMan at the ready.



I fired a cast back to the same spot and repeated the retrieve. This time there was nothing timid about the way the cod attacked and I found myself in a tussle with a more sizeable fish. My relatively heavy gear made short work of the fight and I quickly had my second ever Murray cod at my feet. Running the tape over my catch, it came in at 61cm and I had a new PB! After removing the ZMan from the corner of its jaw, it powered back to the protection of some deeper water and my smile from the previous day returned in full force.

Deciding to explore a section of river that I had not ventured to on the previous day, things went pretty quiet and I started to doubt my tactics. Maybe I needed a more traditional cod lure? You know, the big bladed spinnerbaits, super deep diving hard bodies or the jointed surface lures. I tried them too... all of them. For the next 2 hours I cast the creek to a froth.

Guess what lure landed me my next Cod? Yep, the old faithful ZMan SwimmerZ! Much like the previous fish, it struck as I rolled the lure over mid river boulders and provided a brief but spirited tussle. Number three was about the same size as my first fish and was every bit as spectacular to look at. From the white tail and fin tips to the mottled green and gold body that is so distinctively Aussie, they are just a special fish.



A Murray cod on the baitcast gear and ZMan SwimmerZ.



Spin gear and SwimmerZ.

Despite many more casts over the rest of the morning, it was not until the late afternoon that I added to my tally. Once again it was the ZMan that produced for me. I had moved into a deeper section of the river and switched over to a 3/8oz SnakelockZ on my SwimmerZ, to get more casting distance and keep the lure closer to the bottom. The

jighead may have changed, but the result did not.

Once again the fish hit with a vengeance in the deeper water near a drop off. This fish I estimated to be in the mid 50's and was my first fish of the weekend on my new baitcast rod. Feeling new confidence in my casting ability, and that the fish were active, I continued to cast my ZMan and worked my way along the bank.



Another beautifully marked Murray cod.

I came across a semi submerged shrub that looked like prime Cod territory, however overhead and nearby foliage afforded me very little casting room. I thought my way through it and used all of my limited skills to lob a few good casts into the strike zone. As with many casts that weekend, my first couple came back untouched. I persisted, experimenting with letting the lure sink to different depths and eventually I was rewarded. Just as I was bringing the lure past the shrub, close to the bank, my fifth Cod struck. All that casting practice in the park was worth it!



After the rain.

That was late arvo on day two and I cast my arms off that night and the next morning in an effort catch more and bigger cod... but alas it was not to be. Having started the weekend with modest expectations, I was happy as a pig in mud to leave for home on day three with five cod to my name and a PB of 61cm. Not bad for a beginner I reckon!



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