



Bob's World

By Bob Davis

WINTER 08 – Bring On The Summer!

October is the month of change. We can see the natural rites of spring around us, and we can feel summer coming. South of the tropics, the heaviest of our cold weather gear has been put away, and we're looking for lighter clothes. We're also sorting out our tackle for the coming season.

This year was my first winter actually living on the NSW South Coast, rather than commuting to it for fishing, from Canberra. Hence I'm now a weekday saltwater angler too, no longer limited to weekends and holidays. For those readers who remember me from TBF days, I've now completed the circuit. Since my first stint in Canberra, in addition to shorter project stints in Brisbane and Cairns, by finding work as a CPA or in IT, I've lived in Perth, Carnarvon, Darwin, Sydney, Perth again, then Hobart, before returning to Canberra – and now my home is Fishermans Paradise, near Ulludulla. The name of this little village makes my friends smile – yeah, where else would Bob want to live, eh? My boats have been trailed more miles than I can count and seen lots of different water – and many different fish!

Living and working in a place lets you tap in to the fishing in ways not possible when you merely visit. What a difference immediate proximity makes! Now I can take advantage of those wonderful spells of flat calm winter days. It's true, you know – the South Coast does not close for the winter! The fish don't all hibernate like bears. There are still good fish to be had but, just like us, they change their habits, and often their locations, with the seasons.

When I moved to the South Coast

in early Autumn, I moved with the intent of being a full-on year-round angler. I decided that my arsenal had to be revitalised to ensure I had the flexibility needed to take advantage of whatever conditions and fishing circumstances, nature threw my way. That meant a review of boats and tackle and techniques. It's very easy as an angler to get locked into narrow-minded preferences, and to limit oneself to particular forms of fishing from yesteryear. But that's a bit like walking backwards into the future - why put unnecessary constraints on yourself? Better to remove the self-imposed shackles and spread the angling options, I say.

Living On The Coast

For the past decade, my primary fishing preference was offshore, only fishing the bays and estuaries or lakes on days when going offshore wasn't on. Living on the south coast, you quickly realise that the inshore reefs, bays, estuaries and coastal lakes are excellent all-year fishing options, far too valuable to be regarded merely as 'fallbacks' for bad weather days. The thousands of people with smaller tinnies already know this, of course.

My deep veed fibreglass 18 footer isn't ideal for estuary and coastal lake work. I needed something capable of creeping across shallow sandbars and getting into quiet backwaters. Thus one of the first

enhancements to my fishing world has been a second boat, a Stacer 380 tinnie with a 15hp Mercury on the back. An electric trolling motor is coming, to add a stealth element – bream are a nervous fish, often frightened off the bite by outboard motors. For the very same reason, I looked for a pre-loved boat with a flat marine ply floor and marine carpet already installed – to keep noise levels from within the boat down.

The last time I ran two boats was when I lived in Darwin. There I had a big alloy plate boat for going offshore, and a 12 foot tinnie for harbour, river and billabong work, after barra. Having a roof-topper permanently installed on the 4WD roof rack, with the outboard motor mounted on a custom bracket welded to the bull bar, was the standard Darwin rig. This time around, the 12 footer has its own trailer. Even with the clever roof-topper loading devices now on the market, I found having a 12 footer on a roof rack too much of a hassle. I'm lucky in the sense that I now have enough yard space to park two boats on trailers.

The latter part of my winter has been used to sort out the tinnie. I can tell you straight that sitting on a bare alloy thwart for any extended period on a cool winter day does little to enhance the angling experience! The boat now sports a pair of poly plastic swivel seats, mounted on adjustable



thwart brackets - and yes, cushions – which are as essential as a good thermos and decent wind and spray proof jacket, for winter fishing on Lake Conjola.

Living just a five minute walk from the ramp at the top of Lake Conjola, this little boat is a perfect fit. Conjola, in the winter just passed, has produced a monster salmon – not to me, alas, but to a local club fisherman who took it on a trolled lure – and produced some croc-sized flathead. Bragging rights go to the locals who have caught flatties over 90 centimetres – many of which are released. It has quiet winter days, to be sure, but Conjola regularly produces good bream and flathead, and heaps of chopper tailor.

Contemporary techniques, flicking small hard bodied lures and soft plastics on light line, work really well for winter bream. Finding deeper holes where sun-warmed water flows in off shallower banks with the tidal shifts, is one of the most successful local tricks for finding good flathead.

In my younger days, I really loved beach and rock fishing. On the latter, in my early twenties, my mates and I perfected that skill essential for all rock fishermen – the Octopus grip. That's what you do on a less-than-sensible platform when confronted with a big wave: hurl yourself flat to the rock and cling on with every sucker you've got!

Now at a more sensible age, fishing marginal rock platforms on bad water days is no longer a driving need, but fishing the headland suds from sensible platforms, and fishing the beaches for tailor and salmon, are as enjoyable today as they were for me 30 years ago. My long rod has returned to the active service list, and my partner now has her own ten foot stick with a medium sized threadline reel for beach work.

All I need to do now is get her to understand that the very best times to fish a beach are dusk and, to my mind often better, dawn – which means visiting the day before for a dusk session, to read the beach and see where the gutters are, and actually being there in the dark next morning, rigged, baited up and ready to cast when the sun first peeks its head above the Pacific horizon. I don't care if the late-riser beach jiggers see me in my fishing waders



– on winter mornings, believe me, waders are a very smart idea for beach fishing! There are good tailor and salmon to be had through the colder months. I've also taken flathead and whiting from the beach gutters. We'll soon begin to see mulloway with the warmer months.

With my base at Fishermans Paradise at the head of Lake Conjola, I use the excellent launch ramps in Ulludulla Harbour, about a 15 minute drive south, for heading offshore.

For now at least, the NSW Government has not declared marine reserves or conservation areas around Ulludulla, unlike those declared to the near north at Jervis Bay, or to the south running from Batemans Bay and down past Narooma. Unlike those places, out from Ulludulla I don't need to constantly hawk-eye the GPS to ensure I'm not fishing illegally. With Burrill, Tabourie and Conjola Lakes so close, the beautiful Molymook Beach, and good fishing offshore, Ulludulla offers a lot for anglers and families.

The usual winter run of cuttlefish on the south coast makes them the best bait in the colder months for snapper and morwong. I didn't attempt to take my boat out wide after the winter run of yellowfin and albacore. It's too far wide for an 18 footer. Closer in, on a calm winter day, there's always a handful of local boats to be seen, drifting the inshore reefs and broken ground further out for snapper, morwong and good

Bob's wife Han Jie, with her first ever snapper - definitely a 'red' letter day for all concerned !

flathead.

As is always the way when moving to a new place, a good part of my winter has been spent just getting the lay of the land, and gradually meeting the local people. Moving in has been very like taking a fishing holiday to a new place for the first time. What are the first things you do after settling in to your accommodation? First, find the launch ramps for the boat. Go there, and start chatting to fishermen. They might not reveal their secret spots, but most fishermen don't mind sharing a bit of their local knowledge – and it is invaluable. In particular, try to discover from them a few places to try for catching your live bait, and places to use jigs for fresh squid. Fresh is best.

Make contact with the local volunteer rescue group, or whoever else maintains the radio watch service, and start to tap into their local protocols. Find out if there's an active local fishing club – get their phone number and talk to the president or secretary. Find out if they're running any outings while you're there, and see if they'd mind a guest boat tagging along. That's the sort of thing that pays good dividends, and a lot of clubs enjoy guest members.

One really useful thing to do is to hunt out and visit the local chandleries, fishing tackle and bait shops. Apart from the fact that you'll inevitably need to buy some gear and bait, the people who run local boating and tackle shops are always willing to talk about fishing in their local area. Moving to a new place has reminded me of the special camaraderie that exists amongst anglers, and people who run tackle shops do it because they enjoy it. They are the ones most tapped into the local scene because they're the ones the locals buy their tackle from – and talk to. I enjoy a good winter chat, and the Ulludulla tackle shop owners have proven to be nice people.

Yes, my winter on the coast has been productive and enjoyable.

Now, bring on the summer!

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