



## Fishing TIPS #1: Chasing Fingermark!

**W**hilst discussing my input to the magazine some time ago, I said to the editor that I was not contemplating much in the way of expeditions to new country for a while, as I was concentrating on setting up my new Quintrex tinnie.

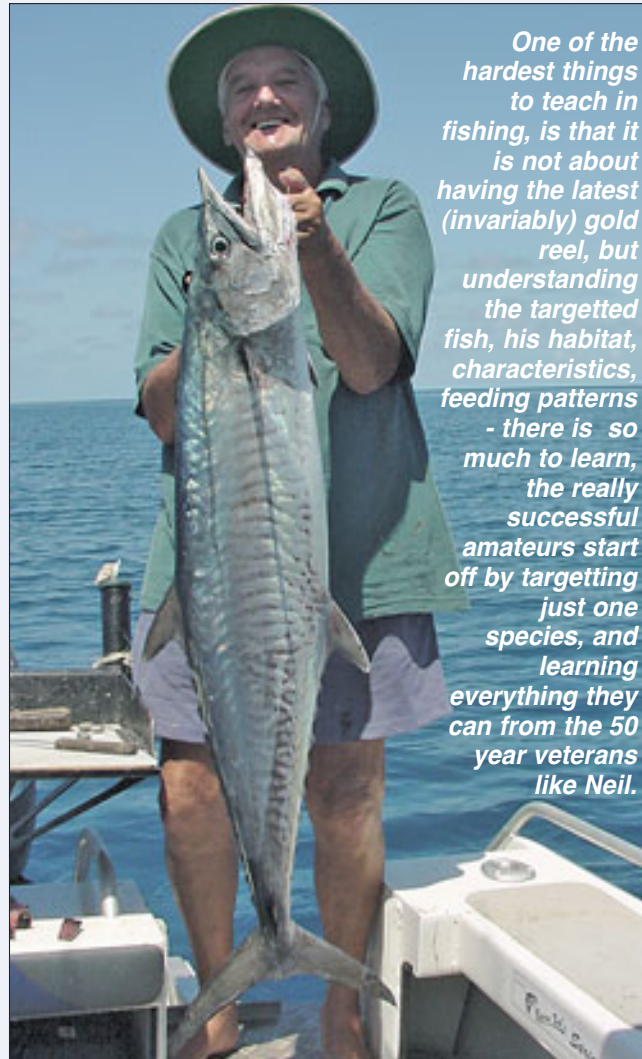
He quickly suggested I should do something on fishing, but my response was that everybody writes articles such as “*I went fishing at my secret spot using my secret bait and caught heaps of fish*” and I thought this was pretty boring.

PW was persistent. He pointed out that between my fishing mate John Turnbull and myself, we had over one hundred years of fishing experience between us, and we’ve probably forgotten (“*or take for granted, and do on automatic*”) stuff the average fisho would kill to know or experience.

“Neil, why not take us fishing with you? You guys do things that go way past lures, baits and ‘secret spots’. I reckon you should try and pass on the hunting skills – fishing lore, the

# Ebb & Flow

with Neil Dunstan



*One of the hardest things to teach in fishing, is that it is not about having the latest (invariably) gold reel, but understanding the targeted fish, his habitat, characteristics, feeding patterns - there is so much to learn, the really successful amateurs start off by targetting just one species, and learning everything they can from the 50 year veterans like Neil.*

characteristics you’ve learned about different species over the years . . . you blokes have an awful lot of knowledge and experience; I’m sure you must have picked up a few handy hints which we could pass on to our readers, whether they fish in Qld, Tassie or WA.”

After thinking about this for a while I decided that maybe we could write something that could be useful to some of our people, so this is what we have come up with.

My first thought was that John was probably the best

coral trout fisherman I have ever seen. Being the owner of a professional line fishing boat working on the GBR, he caught trout on a handline for fifteen years.

I mentioned this to John and suggested he write something on coral trout and his reply was largely unprintable: “*I only catch the buggers, you write all that rot for the magazine!*”

Eventually, I managed to convince him to put together a list of hints which the editor would have to turn into something the readers might learn from, so this is an ongoing project - if I can

keep him interested in something other than “*catching the buggers!*”

The next thing was for me to start the series off and I was wondering how I would go about it, as my writing just comes out of my head in a rush when I sit down to put something together . . . I’m sure readers realized this long ago, as they try to make some sense out of it!

I decided to go fishing and contemplate this problem while out on the water, so a couple of days later I launched my new Quintrex 455 tinnie for a bit of a trip out to some of my local fishing spots as the weather had been terrific for weeks and I hadn’t been out for more than two days.

Off I went and completely forgot what I had gone out for, as I was having a ball catching fish and chasing pelagics, so that when I got home just before lunch, I thought “*What the hell am I going to write about?*”

Thinking about the trip I had just completed, I thought that I would just write about what I had done in the last couple of hours, and as it included quite a few different techniques; it could help.

### Close To Home

Soon after launching, I set up as usual for a quick troll around the entrance to Sarina Inlet, as I often get good catches within two hundred metres of the boat ramp.

I carry in my boat a number of outfits which are set up for different types of fishing, and as they are all ready to go I can change my tactics quickly to suit the opportunities.

I only use floating lures to keep them from sinking to the bottom and getting snagged as I work on the fish. Once I have the fish in deeper water and calmed down a bit, I hold the rod in one hand and begin to wind the other lines in without taking the rod out of the holder ie, I just reach down and wind the reel handle whilst the rod stays in the holder.

This is possible as the boat is going slowly forward, and I can keep pressure on the hooked fish without actually winding. Needless to say, this can only be done with quality reels and good drags that take care of the fish's runs on their own.

After that, it is a simple matter of finishing off the fish and bringing them to the gaff which in this case was a very nice fingermark (or spotted scale sea perch) around three and a half kilos, a great start for the day, as I was still only three hundred metres from the boat ramp, and had only been in the water for about twenty minutes.

### **Catching Fingermark**

A couple of hints to catch fingermark may be of help here as they are one of the best eating fish in the sea, fight like hell, and are pretty cunning.

As previously mentioned, fingermark tend to hang

around schools of bait when they are pushed up into shallow water near reefs, but they are normally found around headlands and at the mouth of large systems emptying out to sea. The best time in our area to chase them is during the smaller tides on a making moon, and the trick is to have a high tide just after dark. On a nice dark night which it should be on a small making moon, we anchor over the reefy bottom out from a headland and then out go the squid lights.

As soon as any squid are caught they are immediately sent back down to the bottom, preferably alive - and then you hang on.

We normally use seventy pound handlines as they have to be pulled out of the reef quickly or they will rub you off on the reef.

To catch them during the daylight you can troll lures over known grounds where they are usually caught, using the green death lure which I described earlier. This lure is universally known amongst fingermark fishermen as the best by miles.

As I mentioned earlier when bait schools are pushed up onto the tops of shallow reef areas you can be fairly sure that fingermark will be around, and usually right underneath them.

I have often run my sounder over these areas, and there is often a school of around twenty or so just sitting there.

The trick is to be able to get your lures right down near the bottom and through

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under the bait school without getting your boat too close by cutting across at an angle.

Usually you will only catch one fish with the lures, but sometimes a second one will have a go - but after that, you can pull lures all day and they will ignore them even though they are all still there.

At this time I then pull up thirty metres or so away from the bait school and try a different trick.

Using an Ugly Stik fitted with an ABU 5000 loaded with six kilo line, I tie a 4/0 chemically sharpened hook to the end of the line without any lead and put on a small pilchard, or better

still, a fresh herring. I then cast it out into the top of the school and let it waft down through the bait school to the fish sitting underneath.

Some times they will take it straight away, and other times it has to be cast out many times before one will take it - but sooner or later, one will have a go.

Once a fish has been caught this way, they will then go off the bite for a while, but I usually go off somewhere else and have another shot on the way home, as invariably, they are still there.

So there are a few tips on catching fingermark which I hope will help you catch one of the nicest fish in the ocean; beautiful to look at, best eating around and a really good fighting fish to boot.

My trip out that day also covered trolling for mackerel, catching ribbon fish for spaniard baits, fishing deep reefs and also shallow reefs for grassy sweetlip, stripy bass, blue parrot or black spot venus tusk fish and some others, so I will continue on with how I went about catching them in later stories.

I will also continue to harass John until he gives up some of his secrets on catching coral trout which should be a bit of an eye opener.

- Neil Dunstan

**F&B**