

The Urangan Estuary NSW

Urunga is one of the better-documented fishing locations on the New South Wales Mid North Coast.

Referred to as Long White Sands in local aboriginal language, it is blessed with clean surfing, swimming and fishing beaches. They are magnificent and seemingly never crowded. It's an ideal location for family days on the water capped with a fish barbecue and a few cold beers. What more could you ask for?

The Bellinger and Kalang rivers merge at Urunga before exiting into the Pacific. It's always been a popular destination with estuary, beach and rock anglers and continues through the years to produce quality catches of varied species.

These two big NSW Mid North Coast rivers have their origins high in the Great Divide and by the time their waters mix at the lazy seaside village of Urunga, about 20 minutes drive along the Pacific Highway south of Coffs Harbour, they have passed through a diverse and productive fishing habitat.

The upper reaches of both rivers can be found on the Dorrigo Plateau, easily accessed in the family

Story & Pics By Mike O'Neill



wagon and all within striking distance for a day's outing chasing a few feral trout.

Browns and rainbows can be hunted in the many feeder streams, which are stocked regularly with fry from the Dutton Trout Hatchery.

In the more temperate downstream waters, you'll find a dedicated band of fishos swishing lures and flies for Australian bass (perch to many of the locals). And if you have a mind to dabble for freshwater mullet, there's any number of these silvery speedsters to provide morning or afternoon fun hanging a few grubs or dough beneath a float.

One of the tricks I learned during many years creek fishing as a youngster on the family farm is using

a good berley of pollard and Epsom salts to really stir up mullet and bring them on the bite.

Simply mix the pollard and salts with water until it has a dough-like consistency and roll into balls before tossing it in your chosen fishing area. A back eddy is a good spot, the berley stays on the bottom and slowly breaks away, attracting fish.

Berley can be used to enhance fishing for a range of species. It works well on bream flathead tailor and blackfish – the ingredients may change but the principle is the same.

When baitfishing for bream, flathead or tailor, I use old pilchard pieces... you know the drill, the ones that have been thawed and frozen several times and feel like slush when you try to use them for bait. These,

along with three or four-day old loaves of bread and a couple of handfuls of chook feed all go into the berley mincer – a section of six inch stormwater pipe with a heap of holes in it – and hung over the back of the boat.

There's nothing like a slimy berley trail in quiet water to arouse the interest of wiley bream and at times you will be surprised at just what creeps up the trail looking for an easy feed.

The Kalang and Bellinger rivers' estuary system is renowned for big flathead with best times September through December with fish readily taking lures and baits.

In the tidal reaches of both rivers, there's mangrove jack, bream, whiting luderick, jewfish and tailor. And when fishing around the road or rail bridges, don't be surprised to catch Moses perch. These attractive fish, normally an ocean dweller, seem to have taken a liking for the area and have set up residence in the deep holes around the bridge pylons.

And if you want to leave the boat at camp and stretch your legs, it's not too hard to catch a feed fishing the beaches and rocks north and south of the estuary mouth.

Rock fishing areas worth a try for tailor, jewfish and bream are at Wenonah, Hungry and Budagen Heads and Tuckers Rock

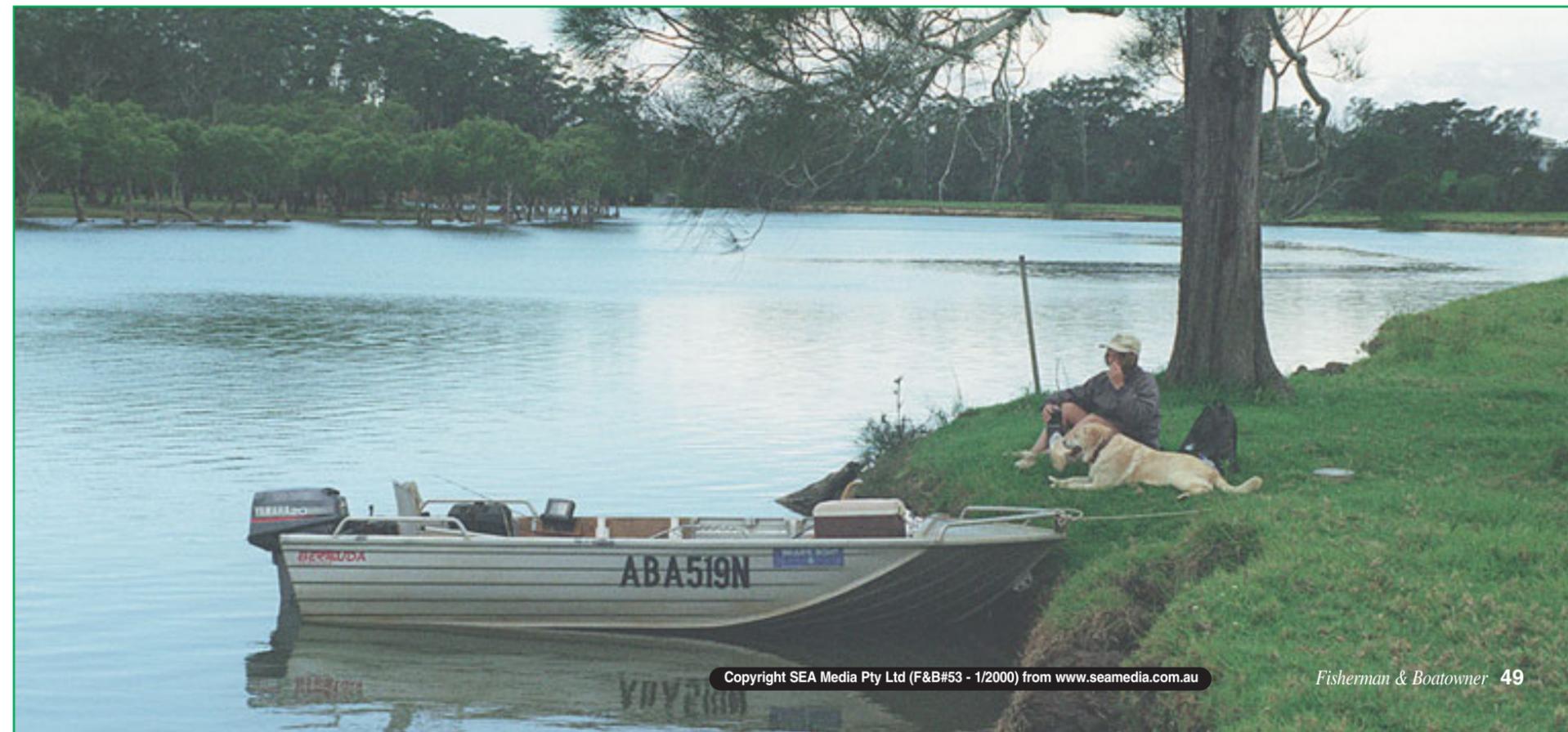
There's good offshore fishing chasing Spanish and spotted mackerel during



Above: Urunga back channel - an ideal fishing platform and a chance to stretch boat-cramped legs, this old wreck in the back channel connecting the Kalang and Bellinger rivers produces flathead and bream on lures when the tide has almost peaked . . . but it is a late evening or daybreak proposition.



Above: No boat, no worries! – there are numerous sandflats in the Urunga estuary which offer serious wading opportunities and access to the deeper channels. Below: You don't have to travel far upstream from Urunga to understand what makes this place so special. It offers varied fishing options and ever-changing scenery . . . just the spot for a morning tea break during a family fishing day.



January, February and March and snapper and teraglin feed around the reefs, which extend out from Urunga for about 4 kilometres before merging into a sand belt with more reef beyond, from November through March.

The bar at the mouth of the estuary is shallow and must be considered dangerous, particularly on the run-out tide. It makes good sense to take the extra effort to travel to Wenonah Head –that's where the local fishing club members go to launch their boats from the beach. They use a tractor for club outings but medium-size boats can be launched with a four-wheel-drive.

As in most estuaries along the Mid North Coast, March through May is prime time. This is when the weather is a little more settled and the mullet run occurs, sparking activity from jewfish, bream and tailor. It's also a time for luderick fishos to take out those well-oiled centrepins and sloppy rods and start

scratching around for greenweed and cabbage leaf.

Around the mouth of the estuary is best fished during an hour before and after each tide. At other times the water flow is usually hard and fast.

If the warmer summer months present a more attractive fishing holiday lure, plan for early morning outings as the north easterlies are prevalent during this period. They usually push up around 11am but can come earlier sometimes on the change of a tide.

Just upstream from the mouth, the estuary splits – the Bellinger River to the right, the Kalang to the left.

Along the Bellinger there's a rock wall on either side for a few hundred metres, both of which fish well for blackfish and bream.

Once past the rock walls there are shallow, sandy flats both sides of the river where big flathead like to bask in early morning sun. These areas fish best an hour before and after the



Above: Author's wife Adele shows off a keeper flathead taken on a brown and red shallow-running Nilsmaster. She uses a light Pro-Qualifier spin outfit spooled with 12lb (6lb diameter gel spun).

Below: This lazy Urunga lizard fell for a slow retrieved gold and black Yozuri lure.

flood tide and provide ideal conditions for lure tactics.

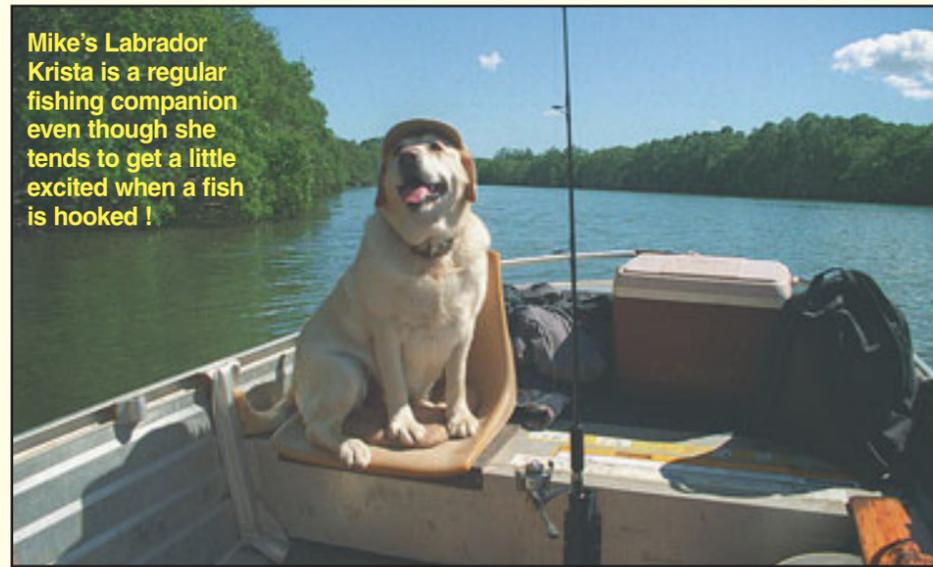
As the water starts to recede, concentrate on the areas where the flats meet the main channel, switching to deeper running lures that get down and bump, hump and thump along the bottom, kicking up spurts of sand with its bib.

Continuing upstream you'll find the shallow mouth of Back Creek and from here up to where the river splits around Tuckers Island at Mylestom are good nipper grounds. The water around Tuckers Island produces good whiting and flathead.

Back at the mouth, the left fork into the Kalang River around the vee wall is a popular spot for luderick, bream, flathead and whiting. Travelling upstream you'll find sand bars and flats crisscrossed with small, deeper channels. Easiest access is along the starboard side rock wall until you reach the main bend about one kilometre from the mouth then head across to the left bank and up to the rail and



Mike's Labrador Krista is a regular fishing companion even though she tends to get a little excited when a fish is hooked!



Well, I'll Be Doggone. .

Life's a bitch: but then there's fishing. It was a clear, crisp morning on the Kalang River. The cold breath of winter washed over me as I tickled the 20hp Yammy and pushed 'Bear's Boat II' onto the plane.

Beside me is my ever-faithful companion Krista, who just loves to ride with her head in my lap as we speed across the water. I don't know why everyone calls her a

start reeling it in before she goes into action. Plunging head and shoulders into the water alongside the boat, she snatches the fish as it nears the surface then unceremoniously spits it out on the floor of the boat.

Hooking up on a reasonable fish, I stood up for better control. This really excited Krista. She bounded forward, catapulting me into the more-than-cool water.

I was carried some 50 metres downstream and before clambering to safety along the rock wall, I looked back to see Krista sitting up in the driver's seat looking every bit the master – I swear one of these days I'll teach her how to start the motor.

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Right: The Kalang River rail bridge pylons provide holding structure for all estuary species – there's even a resident population of Moses perch.

road bridges.

There's plenty of good water further upstream, particularly at the next fork (inappropriately known as Snapper Hole) where you can expect to tussle with jewfish, bream (and if you're lucky) mangrove jack.

Small to medium boats can explore the upper tidal reaches of both rivers but be advised, they are shallow in parts with plenty of sand and gravel shoals hungry for a feed of prop.

Experience in running



our coastal rivers and estuaries has taught me to always carry a spare ... and suitable tools for the replacement job.

Urunga's two main launch sites are within a few hundred metres of each other downstream of the road and rail bridges.

While both provide good launching facilities, the second ramp also has excellent fish cleaning tables with running water and plenty of shade.

There are several caravan and camping parks in the Urunga area with the Urunga Heads Holiday Park

set at the mouth of the two rivers. It has level, grassed powered sites. There's also on-site vans and self-contained cabins for those wanting a little more comfort.

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