

Broome's Fiesty Sails

Broome is a tourist and fishing mecca. During the winter months 2 things arrive in big numbers in Broome; the "grey nomads" and the sailfish.

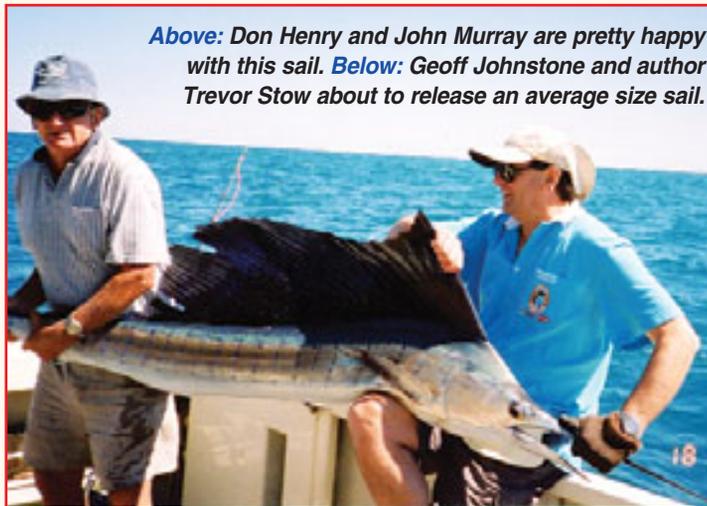
There are some sails in Broome from May onwards but the big concentrations start to move into the area in July and are normally still present until November. The best month is usually September.

Sailfish fishing in Broome only started seriously in the mid to late 1980's when word started to spread about the large number of sails present in the area. Col Roberts and the Roebuck Bay Game and Sportfishing Club started the ball rolling to really put Broome's sailfishing on the map by starting the first Broome sailfishing tournament.

The results of this tournament were stunning in the early 1990's. One year saw over 500 sails tagged and over 2000 sails raised. Also during the 1990's saltwater flyfishing started to gain popularity in Australia and in 1995 the first Australian and International Sailfish Fly Rod Challenge commenced. This event only lasted 3 years but in 1996, 13 boats tagged and released 127 sails and 1 marlin, all caught on fly



Above: Don Henry and John Murray are pretty happy with this sail. Below: Geoff Johnstone and author Trevor Stow about to release an average size sail.



over the 5 day competition. When you consider how difficult it is to hook and land a hard mouthed fish like a sail on a fly, this result is nothing short of sensational.

More recently, in 2002, 17 teams fished the Broome Billfish Tournament for 4 days. They landed 301 sails and marlin. Champion boat

and spring tides should be avoided. The neap tides have a window of around 7/8 days twice a month. It is generally agreed that the neap tide leading up to new moon is the preferable time to be targeting sails.

Water temperature of course plays a part in successful sailfishing and at this time of year the temperature

was FAD11 with Reel Girls on board. They landed 47 sails and 2 marlin. Not bad for 4 days fishing!

Tidal Influence

Fishing during the right time of the tidal movement is one of the most important considerations when planning a trip. Roebuck Bay is the recipient of a massive amount of water from the Kimberley interior. This water is dirty most of the time. Broome is renowned for some of the biggest tide movements in the world, spring tides of up to 12 metres which can disperse muddy water 30 kms out to sea. On the other hand the neap tides of "only" 2/6 metres enhance the water clarity and seem to attract the bait fish and the sails.

As a result fishing trips should be planned around the neap tides

Hey - there's no doubt about this bloke Trevor Stow from Victoria - he and his mates sure do get around. Recently, Trev and a few mates from beautiful downtown Paynesville Vic, decided to head for the warmth on the other side of Australia - to Broome WA.

Trevor's aerial shot of Broome WA, one of the hottest - in both senses of the word - sailfishing centres on the planet.



Great shot of intense, light tackle sailfish activity off Broome. Fishing the neap tides is the preferred choice of the top skippers working out of this terrific all-release fishery.



hovers around 25 degrees.

Gear & Tactics

One of the attractions for me is the comparatively lightweight gear that can be used to catch sails. For those anglers in the southern half of Australia, just take along your Shimano 6500 Bait Runner reel and favourite snapper rod rigged up with 10 kg string. Alternatively, if overheads are your go, then a TLD20 or similar on the same rod.

Teasers are used to attract the fish and the ones used in Broome are not dissimilar to what you would use in Bermagui to tease up a striped marlin. Daisy chains, Broome Birds, plastic squid and spreader bars are all popular and successful choices.

Top bait in Broome is garfish. They are bridled up and ready to go. Once a sail is sighted behind the attractors, a garfish is cast to the fish and the attractor pulled out of the way. The sails normally switch to the bait quite readily.

Sails are like marlin, they have quite a hard mouth and can be difficult to hook. Hooking a sail is really the same as hooking a brown trout on a dry fly. You must wait a few seconds for the fish to take the bait and turn before lifting the rod. If you strike too soon or too hard the hook will not usually sink in and an opportunity will be missed.

Once hooked, expect the sail to jump from the water several times and peel a couple of hundred metres off your line. They really are great fun on light gear.

Sails tend to hunt in pods (schools) and multiple hook ups are common. Once one fish has been attracted by the teasers, expect several others to take an interest. On our recent trip we had numerous double hook ups and once, hooked, landed and released 4 sails simultaneously. That really tested out the skills of the anglers and the captain. Once one boat hooks up, suddenly all the boats in the area seem to converge. It is not necessarily a bad thing either as often the extra boats, extra teasers etc tend to excite the school and get them active.

Charters

For most of us it is not really a proposition to hitch up the trailer boat behind the 4WD and head off to



Satisfaction and smiles all around from the diverse fishing action off Broome.



Broome. It is just too far. Melbourne to Broome *and back*, is a staggering 10,300 km! As a result, local blue water charters are the only option.

Broome has 3 charter boat operators who specialize in sail fish charters and 3 others who mix up game fishing with bottom bouncing. We used Tony Houston from **Boss Bluewater Charters** Ph 0418 122102, web site www.bossbluewater.com.au and found him to be excellent. We certainly got our money's worth. Tony met us at the boat at 6.30am and we did not get back to port until sunset at about 5pm. Tony has had a number of years experience in catching sails and it is a passion to him. On his days off he gets a few mates together and goes sail fishing. His gear was in first class condition

and his deckie knew his stuff.

Cost of an exclusive day charter with Tony is \$1,200 for up to four anglers (with a small extra charge for wife or child who might want to go to) and includes lunch, snacks, fishing equipment and bait.

Broome is a great tourist location for the whole family so if any members of the family do not fish, there are plenty of other attractions for them. The only drawback to Broome is the high cost of airfares to get you there. It costs as much to fly to Broome from the east coast of Australia as it does to fly to many overseas destinations that are significantly further away. Perhaps if a second airline again starts up on the route, then prices will become a little more realistic.

F&B