

# Catching The Mighty Mackerel!

We'd like to re-introduce "Chud" Parker, one of Queensland's best know fishing identities, and a veteran of many years professional and recreational fishing along the eastern seaboard - but especially in his favourite waters off southern Queensland. Back in the first couple of issues of F&B, Chud's series of articles on top reef and pelagic species was widely acclaimed, and over the years have continued to sell through word of mouth and back issues. The most popular, without a doubt, was his classic report on spanish mackerel in F&B #5. We sold out of that issue years ago, and have worn out the office copying machine keeping up with the demand for this great yarn. So being quick on the uptake (!) we've decided to re-run several of his best pieces for all the readers who have joined F&B in more recent years. So settle back, and enjoy learning about a professional fisherman's techniques and know-how in catching these superb eating, hard fighting fish. -PW

Ace northern rivers' fisherman Graham Bell with a superb spanish mackerel of the kind that makes all fishos go weak at the knees. This beast went 27.4 kg, and is typical of the breed as they travel back along the northern NSW coast each year, gaining condition as they go.

They are tough, hard fighting fish. They are found around much of Australia's northern coastline, and are readily accessible to both small and large boat fishermen. In this special report, a professional mackerel fisherman shares a lifetime of knowledge . . .

It was 6.0 am on a cold morning at the Brisbane Fish markets and I was sweating on an upcoming bin with two small Australian bonito in it.

The largest fish was just over 3kg, the other about 2 kg, and I was getting desperate.

It was only 2 days before the Orchid Beach, Fraser Island competition in 1989, and I had very few fresh mackerel baits. I had mentioned this to some of the other buyers who may have been interested, but there were new buyers bidding this day as market administration had admitted private buyers to bid alongside the wholesalers. I couldn't believe it - bonito normally sell for between \$1.50 and \$3.00 a kilo, and here was this "foreigner" despite all the other quality fish available bidding me up to \$5.80 a kg.

The next time that \$17.00 bonito saw saltwater, he was loaded with 2 x 8/0 Mustard hooks and a Tailbiter Suicide hook. He was lowered in over a 'special' pinnacle in 19 metres of water, 10 miles east of Waddy Point on the North Gardiner Banks. I certainly wasn't stuffing about. There was \$2,000 as first prize mackerel on offer and \$1,000 second prize, but the surrounding waters were patrolled by hungry whalers and tiger sharks. I was using 37 kg line, single strand stainless wire and a Daiwa 900 on a custom built 10 kg jig rod.

Well, the 22 kg spaniard I caught that day off the \$17.00 bonito, was originally the heaviest fish overall (worth \$2,500) and I prayed for a gale for the rest of the week! Unfortunately, I was first relegated to heaviest mackerel, then again, by my mate Daryl, to second heaviest.

Such is life on Fraser. Whilst much heavier fish are present in the area from time to time, my 22 kg mackerel was only half the international all



Chud Parker

tackle record of 44.9 kg. It was really just an average fish for the Australian east coast in winter.

After 30 years chasing these fish, I am continually reminded of the phrase "the more you learn, the more you realize how much you don't know".

For example, size and reproduction. Whilst it is sound advice to use a large bait for large fish, sometimes a drifted pilchard can account for a large mackerel.

At a spot approximately 100 km north of Brisbane, some anglers use large bonito and tailor late in the year, targeting and landing mackerel around the 40 kg mark. A long time friend of mine has photos of two with verified fishing weights of 40.5 kg and 37.2 kg and a convincing story of a fish "seen but not landed" estimated at well over 45.45 kg (100 lb).

It has always been my hope to land a fish over this size, but the one chance I had in the pink before dawn at Flinders Reef at Cape Moreton, threw the hooks under the boat after 40 minutes, and swam away.

I do not condone targeting these large fish up and down the coast, be it

Bramble Cay in Torres Strait, Inner Rock at Bustard Head or Coolum Reef on the Sunshine Coast, as these fish are breeding females and should be preserved.

However, 5 and 6 kg fish from Bundaberg to Noosa in November/December each year are heavily roed up and caught in big numbers.

There is a group of fishermen, both commercial and recreational along the east coast who have what I describe as mackerel disease - my son Michael has it too. The main symptom is a fierce determination to seek out and catch spanish mackerel when they could be more comfortably catching reef fish or prawns.

The second symptom is an uncanny ability to be consistently successful while those around them stand and wonder how they do it. Names of sufferers that come to mind are Tony at Bramble Cay, Trevor at Lucinda, Wally at Bustard Head, Bub at Cape Moreton, Peter and Les at Point Lookout and Noel and Graham anywhere in between.

These guys between them are true mackerel "guns". Each has his own special ability - John for example, can get difficult baits such as bonito, to swim properly. Being a class act in landing consistent catches of *Scomberomus Commerson* whilst surrounded by increasing numbers of *Yobbus Retardus* is not easy, and requires large injections of the mackerel disease symptom No 1.

## Background

Our fish, *Scomberomus Commerson* is widespread throughout the Indian and Pacific Oceans and to a limited extent, into the eastern Mediterranean. It is also known as Tmazard Raye (French Indo Pacific) and Carite Estrado (Spanish) into the Mediterranean Sea. In India, it is