

Try This For Fun . . . Pinkies Play On Plastic - In Your Backyard!

Aaron Concorde joins a couple of mates for a day on Moreton Bay he'll not forget for some time - especially as the pinkies were feeding on the surface and devouring plastics with gusto, while the longtails hovered in the background.

In my diary, it states that this trip occurred on the 26th of April 2005. I was to meet Allan Jarvis and Duncan O'Connell at the Raby Bay boat ramp by 5 am.

Allan is an old friend of mine who used to come and see me when I worked in a tackle shop.

As luck would have it, Allan moved towards the bayside suburbs that make access to the "middle" part of Moreton Bay very easy.

The area at his disposal ranges from Mud Island in the north to Macleay, Russel & Coochiemudlo Islands to the south.

Allan introduced Duncan to me and we hit it off straight away.

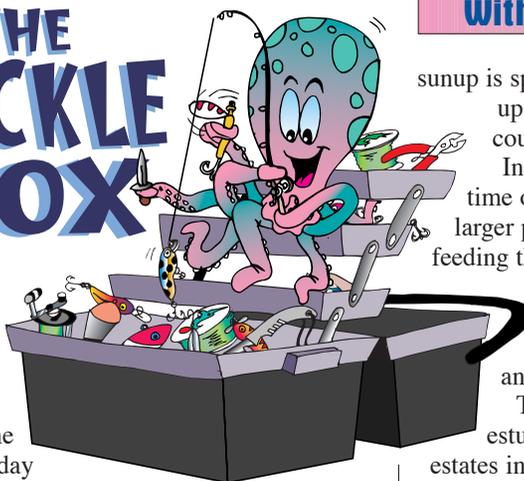
Duncan owns and operates Fish Head Fishing Tackle, a tackle store that specialises in servicing this part of the bay. His store is at Redland Bay.

Duncan loves chasing the pelagics of the bay on fly and also specialises in using rubber tail jigs for squire and snapper.

Having a store close to the water allows Duncan to keep his finger on the pulse regarding the local fish traffic.

So a plan was hatched. All three of us would go out and try our luck on the giant trevally that had been frequenting Cleveland Point and the mouth of the Raby Bay canals. There had been fish in the 3 to 4 kilogram range hitting surface poppers during that magical

THE TACKLE BOX



time of day between first light and daybreak. Honest sized trevally, considering the locale we were to fish.

We would then proceed out to Peel Island to fish for snapper, grass sweetlip and parrot on soft plastics.

Duncan said it was worth having a fly rod and a spin rod rigged for the longtail tuna that had been prevalent throughout the lower end of the bay recently. These are a favourite fish to me; their size, strength and beauty along with their apparent high numbers belie the fact that they are choosing to exist half an hour from the CBD of Brisbane. Sounds like a fun filled-variety packed day!

Let's start the day casting poppers.

There are not too many people who get to enjoy a sunrise as often as those who fish. That period of light prior to

With Aaron Concorde

sunup is special. The mood is generally up with the thoughts on what could happen through the day.

In its own right, it is a fabulous time of day to fish, particularly for larger predators that may have been feeding through the night, or for others that find the changing light advantageous at preparing and executing a pre-dawn raid.

Trevally that frequent the estuaries, rivers and canal estates in South East Queensland do favour the quietness of the dead of night, though pre-dawn is pretty hard to beat.

So the three of us headed to the flats and rock walls that over the previous mornings, had baitfish corralled by giant trevally.

There was a large push of incoming tide as we arrived. This should help any predators to organise any hapless bait in the area, I thought to myself.

It became evident as the sun was trying to lift itself clear of the horizon that there were clouds of baitfish nervously accumulating along the rocky entrance walls to the Raby Bay canals. All we needed was some thing extra, a little structure poking out along the wall to give a predator an ambush point.

We drifted along peppering the rocks

*Duncan O'Connell with
the best squire of the day*



with our poppers of various shapes and sizes. The Rebel Pop R and Storm Chug Bug in their smaller sizes are spot on for this type of fishing. Even a 5cm Pop R can be pelted a reasonable distance on spin gear loaded with light mono or braid.

I copped the first hit, a small GT around 25 cm in length tried to inhale a popper 8 cm long. Greedy bugger.

As we drifted with the aid of the Minn Kota electric to reposition us, we came across a junction of 2 canals. My experience, whether in a pristine river environment or a man made maze, you should never rush past the corners of a junction without thoroughly working the area.

Unseen structure and the fact that eddies occur at these points suggest that they are fish focal points.

Again, my popper was demolished by another sub-foot long GT that managed to wear the VMC treble on the rear of the popper.

Bending down to unhook the little ruffian, we all heard a much larger fish chopping through bait up against a pontoon across from us.

Duncan maneuvered his boat to the up-current side of the pontoon and started to fire in his popper, working it along the front of the pontoon.

No dice. These guys didn't want to play.

We worked the opposite corner for no joy and, under electric propulsion, made our way out to the front of the canals.

Duncan was a bit unsure as to why the larger fish weren't out to play.

Just when you think you have them worked out something else throws a spanner in the works. It's on a level only the damn fish know about as well. If it were common knowledge, I suppose we would have been catching and not fishing.

Reefed at Peel Island.

The next instalment for our day on the bay was to use light spin gear, loaded with "braid" to jig for snapper and squire that frequent the Peel Island area.

This type of fishing has really taken off over the last couple of years, as more and more anglers realise it is probably the best method at targeting quality snapper, hands down. I have seen fish over 10 kilos in weight that friends have caught on rubber tails caught inside Moreton Bay during

daylight hours, so it certainly isn't a gimmick.

I must explain that the majority of these adults are released unharmed, as they are the breeding stock of the bay.

The fish do vary in sizes, though quality fish from 2 or 3 kilos up are not rare. The average would be from 0.5 to 1.5 kilograms, which equates to just legal to around the 45 to 50 centimetre mark.

To be honest, I had never done this before, though I have other friends who fish for snapper from Macleay Island up to the inside of Moreton.

Some of the productive grounds occur between Victoria Point and the mouth of the Brisbane River, wherever there is rock or reef present.

Duncan chose Peel Island, since in the same region, there had been school,

“ . . I could not believe that a mature snapper would find the surrounds in the congested southern part of Moreton Bay natural enough to start chomping bait on the surface . . Unbelievable!”

spotted and spanish mackerel as well as longtail tuna herding bait on the surface.

During our transit from Cleveland Point to Peel Island, we noticed quality longtail tuna sipping bait from the surface in small groups or as individuals. They were not feeding furiously enough to justify breaking out the fly gear, although we thought they might sort themselves out with the big afternoon ebb tide. Time would tell.

It seems the same bait the pelagics eat is also what the snapper are after. Jig colours reflect the colour of hardy heads, sand sprats and frogmouth pilchards. Tail sizes were around 3 to 5 inches in length with a variety of stick baits and flick baits. Common types are from Atomic, Berkley Power Baits, Salt Water Assassins and Zoom soft plastics in greys, greens and pearls.

The majority of the fishing we did occurred around the drop offs that fringe the western and northern regions of Peel Island.

Water depth ranged between 14 and 30 feet, with the most fish showing up on the sounder at around 19 - 22 feet of water. The weight of the jig head used depended on how quickly we drifted with the tide and prevailing current and how deep we intended to fish, though TT Lures and Nitro jig heads from 1/16 to 0.5 ounce were the range we used to effect. Hook size varied from 2/0 to 5/0 depending on the length of the rubber tail.

The main aim is to try and fish the plastic like floating bait.

A floating bait is in fact presenting bait so it seems to waft down or float its way to the bottom, as opposed to having a large weight drag it towards the bottom immediately.

Duncan said his best success occurred when he was imparting very little action at all. In fact, he mentioned if you wanted smaller fish, put more effort into the jig, more like you would do for bream or flathead.

After watching Duncan position the boat I can't stress enough how a quality chart plotter GPS and depth sounder are crucial for this type of fishing.

A part of the North-Western part of Peel Island is a no-fish, Green Zone so to be able to fish the drop offs wide of this area, you have to know where you are in relation to this area at all times. Ignorance is no excuse in court. If you are caught fishing in it, you are in strife.

Also, to be able to watch the sounder like a hawk for any telltale signs of life enables the driver to accurately place the boat and anglers over the fish.

We managed quite a few squire (juvenile snapper) that were from 25 cm to just under legal size (in QLD, snapper have to be 35 cm and have a bag limit of 5 per person per day).

The three of us probed the bombies and gutters that ran off the reef, constantly looking for schooling fish or bait balls on the sounder.

We all had some trouble with a local pest know as a grinner. These are long sandy coloured fish that have a large and very toothy mouth, which is where they get their name. They destroy rubber tails and are NOT a species people target. They have a mouth full of hypodermic needles.

Duncan hooked another grinner that was around 50 cm in length, and as he was about to bring it aboard, a metre long Spanish Mackerel lopped it in half. In 15 feet of water during broad daylight....that was new to me.

Of course, the jigs that Allan and I pegged at the prized pelagic went unnoticed. Still, it was a spectacle to see considering that in SE QLD, spaniards are generally seen offshore, not down in the bottom of Moreton Bay. Not commonly. Could they be coming back??

Not long after this episode, I heard something different, just out of casting range. I thought it was a trevally or some other predatory fish chopping through bait. As I turned to look where the noise was coming from, I looked straight down the maw of a snapper of around 5 or 6 kilos, cutting a path through a patch of hardy heads . . . next I will be seeing Elvis! I thought I was hallucinating.

I could not believe that a mature snapper would find the surrounds

natural enough in the congested southern part of Moreton Bay to feel comfortable enough to start chomping bait on the surface...Unbelievable!

Duncan said it was not rare to see or hear squire or snapper chopping through bait while sneaking around on the electric motor.

Duncan wanted to search the entire top end section of Peel Island, marking any fish with the sounder and GPS. We were about to go past the most northern beacon called the Hanlon Light, when we ran into Mike Connolly, another snapper specialist. He said he had his bag limit already and had released half a dozen others. It was only 8 am. And everyone of them had succumbed to a soft plastic.

Both boats moved down along the northeastern drop off, looking for an active school.

We still encountered plenty of little tykes, though something smoked me that was bigger. Duncan has seen good parrot and grass sweetlip from this area, so it might have been one of

these species I had hooked, as they tend to run through the rough stuff more blatantly than a snapper will.

With more undersized fish coming aboard and going back in the drink, Duncan suggested a move to the mouth of the Rous Channel to fish the Harry Atkinson Artificial reef.

This area is totally exposed and can get a very nasty chop build up through the bay. Any wind direction can make it nasty out here for a small vessel.

Since we had 12-15 knots of South-South West, we took a punt, hoping that it would turn more Easterly as the day progressed.

We arrived right at the turn of the tide and Duncan said we had just gone over one of his GPS marks and there were fish below us showing up on the sounder.

He fired out a cast parallel to the drop off and his plastic didn't even get half way to the bottom before a nice squire climbed all over it.

He said that when they are fired up, the snapper and better quality squire

The author with the longtail tuna that broke the day's drought



will do that; annihilate the artificial before it gets to the bottom.

After a couple sizzling runs, I netted what would turn out to be the snapper of the day.

It showed that by being suitably rigged and ready to go, Duncan was able to capitalize on the situation quickly. I hadn't even gotten the salt water out of my eyes before he had hooked up.

He tried in vain to get a nice fish for Allan and I. We both had our chances, with good hits from active fish, though the hooks didn't find their mark.

A couple of other vessels saw me land Duncan's fish and were quick to

standards for April. There was up to a metre of chop, particularly in areas of high current flow, and we hadn't seen the sun for 6 hours.

Didn't stop us from trying to hook one of these finicky pelagics.

Funnily, they didn't want flies or lures equal in length, profile or colour to what they were eating.

It was the first time in several seasons where downsizing the size of the fly didn't get an immediate response.

I had one longtail eat a frogmouth imitation, only to get a rather large knot in the fly line. For the uninitiated, longtails don't muck around by staying

you could say, "I'm on!" **Four nil.**

I had tied some bigger flies out of some synthetic material from the company DNA, which Duncan stocks at his shop.

First school I cast into, a nice fish of 10-11 kilos ate it. I went to set the hook and the fly came adrift. **Five nil.**

It was now around 3pm and the wind was pushing 20 knots, making casting a bit more challenging. I hooked myself in the shoulder and hat on several occasions when I tried to redirect a cast at feeding fish.

Duncan tried a 3 inch Enrico Puglisi Fly and hooked up solid, only to have the line go limp. A post mortem showed the longtail had bitten through his 20 lb tippet. **Six Nil!**

This was becoming depressing.

The tuna were blasting the hapless bait to smithereens. I counted 12 active, separate schools within a 3-kilometre radius.

It was impressive to watch, let alone participate in.

Duncan tied on another 3-4 inch EP fly. It took another 10 minutes to get upwind and up current to be able to cast into the closest feeding school.

It is vitally important to have the vessel positioned properly to be able to cast into the leading edges of a feeding school, as opposed to coming at the school from behind them.

Attacking a school from behind and downwind does 2 things. Firstly, since the vast majority of pelagics will feed into the wind, all you will be doing is chasing their tails, with a boat that is banging head on into the prevailing chop. It's the noisiest way to approach from. Common response is you really pee the tuna off!

Secondly, fish don't feed well with their tails! You need to have your lures or flies in front of the feeding fish. Their vision comes from their eyes, which are on their head, not tail. That is where their mouth is as well. So, you don't have to be Einstein to figure out that for the lures or flies to get eaten, you need to first be in front of the fish in the first place.

As we got into position, Duncan cast to the left of the school while I aimed for the right.

We both hooked up, though Duncan's fly came adrift again, leaving me to deal with my fish that was over 100 metres away and still going.

After an initial run that was around 150 to 160 metres in length, the tuna

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drift over the same ground we were. Unfortunately, the fish obviously shut down through the extra boating traffic. Never mind, there is always next time...

Time for Choona Chasing.

One thing that hadn't gone unnoticed were the very active schools of longtail tuna working half a kilometre away.

The tide was roaring out at this stage and the tuna were feeding hard along the Chain Banks and the current lines that were ripping off it.

I was the lucky sod to get the front casting deck to myself, with Allan amidsthips and Duncan driving and casting from the stern.

The tuna were gorging themselves on small frogmouth pilchards.

These hapless bait aren't the fastest around and tend to "ball up".

From an angling point of view, the tuna are more likely to stay in the vicinity instead of disappearing just as you reach your casting range, only to have them pop up several hundred meters away.

To say the conditions were ordinary was an understatement.

We had still 15 knots of Southerly that made it cold by Queensland

in one spot to chew what they have just eaten.

It is a savage strike followed by a scorching run.

With a knotted fly line that will not pass through the guides at warp speed, it causes gear failure. The 6 kilogram tippet busted before I could blink. **One nil....**

I tried in vain for another hour with several flies for numerous rejections.

The tuna were so brazen in their feeding we even had the entire front deck and consol splashed by feeding tuna, yet we still hadn't unlocked what they wanted to eat.

I asked Allan to try a popper, as at times when all else fails, a skipping popper would quickly through the school will produce a result. It did, straight up.

Allan was having a ball trying to subdue 10 kilos of rampaging longtail when the hooks came adrift. **Two nil!**

Duncan threaded on a 4 inch plastic and fired it into the same school. Eaten on the drop. The tuna blasted off under the boat and rubbed the braid to breaking point along the keel. **Three nil . .**

Allan tried an old 3-ounce Bucktail Jig. That got eaten and spat out before

A fiery sunrise over Cleveland Point with the City of Brisbane just a few hundred metres away.



doubled back and ran towards us. Gaining the better part of 60 metres, it turned again and scorched off another 100.

For the next 10 minutes I gained all of the line back, with the longtail now off the bow. Another school came tantalisingly close for Duncan to get a cast into, my fish decided to run another 50 metres of backing off the big Loomis fly reel. As the other school over shot us, we concentrated on my fish, where, at the 20 minute mark, it was safely in the net.

After some quick congratulations, I reminded Allan that his wife, who I had promised a longtail to for sashimi, would shoot me if I let it go.

On the lie detector, it weighed 8.5 kilograms.

Thank King Neptune that we finally cracked it. It certainly isn't the largest longtail I have caught, though with our run of luck, it was certainly one of the more memorable.

Duncan lined us up for one last good shot. It was to be our last for the day as it was 4.15pm and he was required for babysitting duties in little more than an hour later!

We pounded back up wind for 10 minutes to get in front of the largest school...*Man, they were feeding hard.*

We had a line of perhaps 80 or 90 visible longtails charging the bait downwind of us. I let go of my fly, and aerialised 40 feet of flyline.

By this stage, the tuna were around 90 feet away. I let loose with the 11 weight and cast the full line. Stripped 5 feet of line, *and I was on again!*

This fish was a little larger and ran east towards another school around 120 metres away. I felt one bump on the line and it went slack.

Darn thing ran through a hundred of its mates where one ran into the tippet, breaking it in the process. A long distance release!

At 4.30 pm it was time to high tail it

out of here.

If there is one thing Duncan's boat is very capable of achieving, it's certainly speed. Still, by the time we were back at the ramp it was 5 pm. We did have to slow down for around 8 kilometres of the return trip due to the incessant chop.

You have to take the good from the bad...

For sheer numbers of fish, it certainly wasn't one of the most successful trips I had undertaken.

Though, as a learning experience, it was right up there.

Lets face it, it's not everyday that you have the chance to unravel the quirks of nature before the day is done.

I have never seen snapper actively feeding on the surface before.

Neither had I seen longtails motor past a perfect frogmouth imitation to inhale a 4-inch bulky fly before. Sure, I have caught longtails on bigger flies but only when they are feeding on larger bait...

I rang Duncan the following day to find out some other statistics.

Firstly, we used 25 litres of fuel in the boat. Split 3 ways, how cheap a day is that!

Secondly, Duncan had several messages on his phone from Mike Connolly. It seems that by putting his mobile phone away under the consol, we had missed the calls from Mike. You see, Mike and his mate found a very active school of squire.

How does 13 in 10 minutes sound to you? And they were all between 45 and 55 centimetres. Sounds more like tailor fishing than chasing snapper.

It just goes to show, if you are willing to hunt around and keep focused, you will find some willing fish.

None of the above involved the use of bait at all. We actively pursued the fish with artificials only.

Geographically, it happened half an hour or so from the centre of Brisbane.

I knew that Moreton Bay had a population of snapper. I just didn't realise it was in good enough shape to fish for them with bait, let alone lures.

The tuna are another thing. Being migratory, they can be here today, gone tomorrow, though they do generally set up camp for a few months, particularly if there is plenty of bait around. For the moment, there is plenty of it.

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