



Left: Going out or coming back in, 'glasses out' seas like these are a real bonus.

Below: Sunset – hopefully the beginning of the red emperor bite.

Steve Jones: *Fishing The Great Barrier Reef*

Far North Queensland really is a fisherman's paradise. We are blessed up here with great reef fishing for trophy eating species like coral trout, red emperor etc, estuary fishing for barra, jacks etc, as well as freshwater options for sooty grunter, jungle perch, barra etc.

My personal fishing passion is for reef fishing and I seem to throw vast sums of money at it for some reason – I must love it. When the weather comes good – I want to be out there.

I rarely have to watch the weather myself because if it looks like coming down, I usually have a long list of fishing friends and crew starting to ring saying "have you seen the weather".

In this article I will try to share a bit of knowledge on how I personally go about it, in the waters around Townsville and Hinchinbrook. Typically this involves steaming to the Great Barrier Reef (typically this is 40 – 50nm off Townsville, or I tow the boat 150km up the coast to Lucinda to launch, and then the reef is only 15 – 30nm depending on which reef).

Reef fishing up here is predominantly split into 2 main types:

- Traditional anchoring on bombies or rough coral bottom – depth 15 to 35m.
- Shoal fishing away from the main reef – depth 45 to 100m, but typically around 50m.

Fishing The Reef Edges – or Bombie Hopping

Target species for this type of fishing off NQ are coral trout and red throat emperor, but you will catch a huge variety including spanish mackerel, cod, nannygai, red emperor, spangled emperor, etc.

The first thing I do is find some structure where I think there will be fish. This involves heading up close to the reef, typically in around 15 – 35m, and watching the sounder.

A good quality colour sounder is a must.

I use a Furuno 585 / 600W with an in hull transducer. You need to have confidence your sounder is going to mark fish. With the bombie fishing we are usually looking for bait rather than individual fish. These show up as yellow/green clouds off the main bottom structure on my sounder. You also need to know where the "pressure point" of the bombie is going to be. This is the leading edge of the bombie where the current hits first. Typically bait and therefore the predators will hang here.

When I arrive at a new reef I have not fished before, I like to sound around the area you wish to fish - along the reef edge – typically 100 – 200m off the reef in around 30m of water or so and mark the larger bombies.

Once you work out which way the current is running (which way the boat is going to hang when anchored), I go upstream of the bombie

Below: Author Steve Jones with a typical GBR red throat emperor

