



The result of a cracking East Gippsland estuary perch session. Frank reckons there are more (and bigger) perch and bass to come too, as techniques and understanding of these fiesty, true blue Aussie natives are developed.

Frank with a 'suspect' catch; what looks to be a hybrid perch caught in the mid-section of a East Gippsland estuary during a hot perch bite.

A Higher Perch..

We join Gippsland born and bred Frank Millito as he writes about another local - the very shy Estuary Perch and the notoriously reclusive Australian Bass - both found in waters that allow a surprising degree of integration - and unbelievably good fishing action. Frank takes up the story

East Gippsland estuary perch are a favourite sport fish on lures and an absolute standout for any angler's Calender in Victoria, but after 10 years of successive drought and hotter than average summers, resident populations of this amazing sport fish in the East Gippsland river system, have dwindled.

It's a well-known fact that perch have the ability to migrate during flood times and leave the estuary to

perform epic ocean journeys, similar to their genetically close cousin the Australian bass, but it's believed this migration is directly related to a spawning outcome and the fish are in search of the right breeding conditions and will find their way along the Gippsland Coast from Mallacoota in the east, through to Corner Inlet, but have been tracked as far west to the Murray River in SA.

These days it's also a well-known

fact that estuary perch and Australian bass can cross breed, creating a hybrid specie that has been found in all Eastern Victorian estuaries. The incidence of hybridisation happens around what is known as the cross over point, when large female Australian bass make their way down from the fresh headwaters of the estuary in search of saline lower reaches of the system around the seagrass beds, where they come across populations of small male

estuary perch that have migrated into the estuary for spawning.

Because they are of a very similar genus, successful spawning can take place and produce what is anecdotally considered by local hatchery operators, to be a super perch that grows faster than normal and clearly displays the physical characteristics of both specimens. Estuary perch and Australian bass are known as euryhaline species which means they can adapt to salt

or fresh water.

Hybridisation has become far more apparent through the drought. Since migration and spawning are triggered by winter flooding, the movement of both species has slowed and successful recruitment has reduced, leaving lower population. Other environmental factors such as the production nutrient rich runoff from heavy rain after bush fires, helped aid massive blue/green algal blooms which killed out vast seagrass beds

through the Gippsland Lakes region, which were essential nursery environments for the newly hatched larvae. As a consequence to the reduction of seagrass, this led to an unsuccessful recruitment period for many years, which in turn also has a massive effect on adult populations of both bass and perch, long term.

My First Perch

As a child growing up in East Gippsland I was fortunate to live