

'Fishing The Hinchinbrook Wilderness'

Web Site

www.australianboatmags.com.au

Sales Enquiries

(07) 5564 2562

Reader or Editorial email

admin@ausboatmags.com.au

Sales Enquiries email

subs@ausboatmags.com.au

Reader/ADMIN Fax

(07) 5564 2563

Reader Postal Service

P.O. Box 98 Paradise Point

Queensland 4216

Publisher

Australian Boat Mags Pty Ltd

ABN 34 167 221 114

(07) 5564 2562

Editor & Production

Peter Webster

Admin & Sales: Mary Webster

Contributors:

Bob Ford

John Porter ("mud maps")

Terrick & Heather Hamiton

Dom Zaghini

Kerry Weedon

Damon Olsen (plus mates

Ben Thrower & Aaron Concord)

Ruth Cunningham

Neil Dunstan

Steve Jones (Offshore)

Australian
BOAT
MAG

www.australianboatmags.com.au

"Fishing the Hinchinbrook Wilderness" is a compilation of many different elements.

The booklet was first conceived by Bob Ford, a long time Cardwell resident and fishing guide, before he and his wife Colleen went cruising in their trimaran, *Moonglow*, for several years, fishing and cruising 'over the top' of Australia.

But originally, Bob's text only went half way down the Channel, so in early Y-2000, F&B magazine decided to upgrade the concept with extensive input from F&B's then Fishing Editor, Damon Olsen, ably assisted by mates Ben Thrower and Aaron Concord. As well, F&B contributors and local enthusiasts, Heather and Terrick Hamilton contributed heaps of knowledge and support, plus words and many excellent photographs. They were joined by Ingham's Dom Zaghini and Kerry Weedon who provided boats, expertise, tackle info and knowledge on many occasions.

John Porter's maps, meticulously hand drawn from all sorts of references (including Bob Ford's original 'mud maps') linked the elements together.

The first edition of "Fishing The Hinchinbrook Wilderness" was published in 2002, and a great deal of effort was poured into a video production between 2004-2007 but due to a couple of washed-out trips,



and competing business pressures, this has never been completed.

Between 1997 - 2007, the writer, together with Ruth Cunningham, made many trips to Hinchinbrook for F&B magazine (which subsequently morphed into the online production **Australian Boat Mag**) using five different 'project' boats, and three different fishing dories - all of which you'll see in various photographs throughout this publication.

Then, just as both the booklet and video were about to be upgraded, Cyclone Yasi roared into Cardwell, in February 2011, causing millions of dollars worth of damage to the community and boating infrastructure, putting both projects on hold, again.

However, this time (in 2013/14), we felt we needed to upgrade the booklet post-Yasi, to assist the Hinchinbrook community's recovery efforts.

With The Boat Mag's Neil Dunstan's expert assistance on the ground, and ABM fisho Steve Jones' invaluable input on bottom fishing the GBR east of the island, that's what we've done here.

In truth, it would be easy to write several books about fishing, boating, and exploring in this extraordinary part of Australia - and we already have several hours of video, so from our point of view it remains a 'work in progress', and we'll keep upgrading it as opportunity, finances (and the weather!) permit.

We look forward to your input and reaction to this latest, online edition of *Fishing the Hinchinbrook Wilderness*.

-PW,
ABM



Contents



Editorial

<i>Peter Webster</i>	5
Introduction: Hinchinbrook Island Communities	
<i>Peter Webster</i>	6
Cardwell, Lucinda Boating Facilities	
<i>FHW Team</i>	10
Safe Boating In The Hinchinbrook Region	
<i>Peter Webster</i>	12



Watching Over **The Dugong**

<i>GRMPA</i>	18
Notes For The Land Based Angler	
<i>Bob Ford</i>	20
The Nine Creeks of Missionary Bay	
<i>FHW/John Porter Maps</i>	22
The Western (Mainland) Side Of The Channel	
<i>FHW/John Porter Maps</i>	26

The **Eastern (Island) Side Of The Channel**

<i>FHW/John Porter Maps</i>	28
The Southern (Lucinda) End Of The Channel	
<i>Peter Webster</i>	30
Remarkable Zoe Bay Ocean Side Of The Island	
<i>Peter Webster</i>	32
Getting Started: The Basics Of Inshore Fishing	
<i>Bob Ford / FHW Team</i>	34
A Baitcaster & A Swag Of Lures	
<i>Damon Olsen, with Ben & Aaron</i>	42
Hinchinbrook Fever: The Gear You'll Need	
<i>Damon Olsen</i>	48
Offshore Fishing Basics	
<i>Peter Webster</i>	58
For The Specialist: Bottom Fishing The GBR	
<i>Steve Jones</i>	60
Beyond Fishing: Hiking the Thorsborne Trail	
<i>FHW Team</i>	66
Beyond Fishing: Camping On The Islands	
<i>FHW Team</i>	68
Beyond Fishing: Snorkelling In The Region	
<i>FHW Team</i>	69
Addendum	70
FHW	

Hinchinbrook & Goold Island ABORIGINAL FISH TRAPS

At Scraggy Point . . .

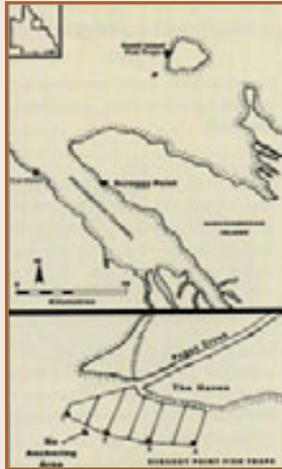
The Aboriginal people of Hinchinbrook Island (Munamadanmy) are the Bandjin or saltwater people. They were mobile people who moved around the island targeting raw materials and food resources.

The Bandjin exploited every niche on the island hunting goannas, scrub hens, scrub turkeys, possums and wallabies. They gathered material to make huts (*mijas*) as well as a variety of stone, bone, hardwood and shell tools. They also exploited the sea, hunting dugong and turtle from small boats and building fish traps (*ngaragubbi*) in the tidal zone.

The Scraggy Point fish traps cover about 2 hectares and are one of the largest, most complex and best preserved in North Queensland.

They consist of a number of enclosures indicating they were probably built some considerable time ago when sea levels were lower than today.

The rich variety of resources obtained from the *ngaragubbi* can be seen in the associated shell midden on the edge of Pages Creek. The midden, approximately 30 metres in length by 10 metres wide and 15 metres high, contains evidence of seafood such as crab, shark, fish and possibly turtle as well as a number of estuary shellfish species such as oysters, periwinkles, mussels (*gugani*) and



A 'no anchor' area is established around the Hinchinbrook Island fishtraps. Please help protect our cultural heritage. Do not anchor inside the buoyed 'No Anchoring Area' as represented on the map.

goma (*Telexcopium* sp.) obtained from the nearby shoreline and creek.

The *ngaragubbi*, still in use today, is an excellent example of the highly successful food harvesting strategies used by Aboriginal people.

& The Goold Island Fish Traps . . .

The traditional owners of Goold Island (Marrajumban) are the Bandjin People.

Records from the early European explorers indicate that the resources of the island group supported a group of people for a large part of the year although they were known to travel to and from Hinchinbrook Island and the mainland coast. They built bark canoes called *gayus* to facilitate this travel.

The fish traps (*ngaragubbi*) cover about 4,000 square metres and consist of a large funnel that is clearly visible together with some pools, loops and straight lines that can only be seen at extremely low tides. The traps provided much of the fish, crabs, oysters and other shellfish that formed a large proportion of the people's diet.

(For any further information, please contact the Girringun Elders & Reference Group [Aboriginal Corporation] Cardwell, Qld 4849)

Hinchinbrook Island and the surrounding region is truly one of the most spectacularly beautiful boating and fishing areas in Australia. Indeed, it is one of the *world's* richest recreational fishing grounds. We are very proud to bring you this updated guide to fishing the wilderness areas and the waters

around this stunning region, although in doing so, we are requesting a very special commitment from each and every fisherperson who 'wets a line' in these waters.

Hinchinbrook is vitally important to future generations of Australians. This island is still virtually the same as it was in the beginning of time, and for this reason alone, we need to cherish

its unique value; protect it from those who would do it harm, and if necessary, fight to preserve it for generations to come.

This is where the 'line in the sand' should be drawn.
We appreciate that the very act of

publishing this booklet, and passing on the hard-won knowledge acquired from our contributors and our own expeditions, could, at first glance, be seen to increase pressure on the Hinchinbrook resource.

However, I earnestly believe that with education and subsequent thought, we can make a difference. We can sow the seeds of conscience.

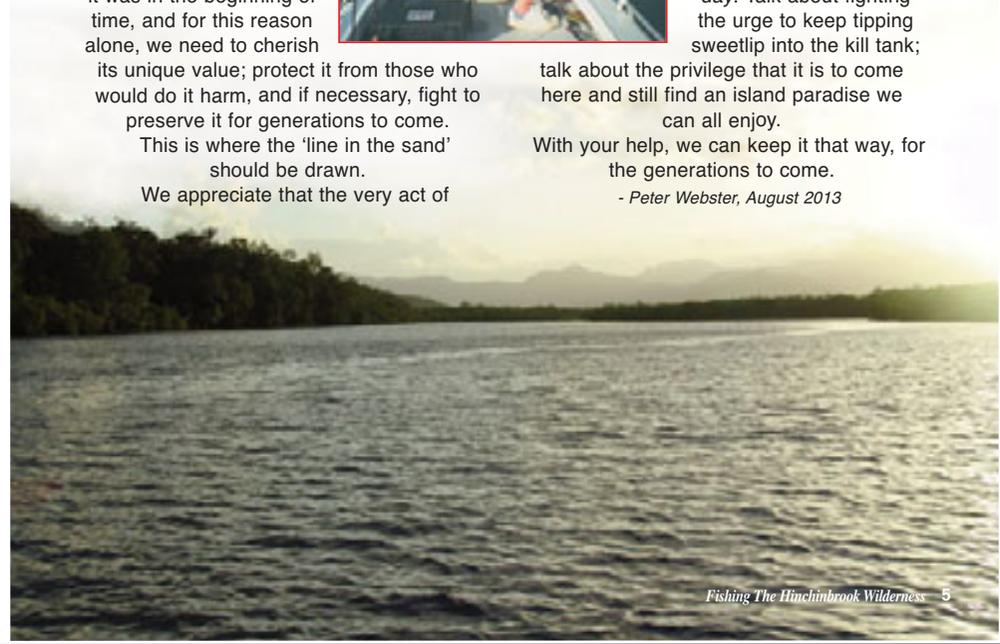
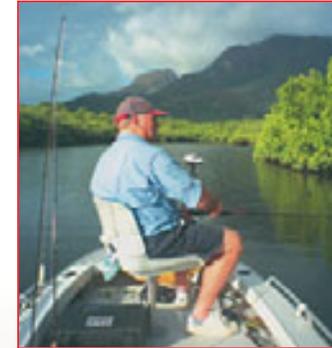
We can encourage people such as yourself, your family and friends, to talk about the issues of protecting what we have here today, for tomorrow.

Talk about caring for the dugong; about taking just *one barra per person per day*. Talk about fighting the urge to keep tipping sweetlip into the kill tank;

talk about the privilege that it is to come here and still find an island paradise we can all enjoy.

With your help, we can keep it that way, for the generations to come.

- Peter Webster, August 2013



Safe Boating In The Hinchinbrook Island Region

by Peter Webster



When we made our first trip to Hinchinbrook back in 1996, we had the sort of view about boating in that region that most Australians have of north Queensland. We knew it was in the tropics, we knew the Island was very large, we'd heard the fishing was outstanding and we'd also heard that a new marina was going to transform the boating facilities for the region.

Subsequently, we towed our Haines Signature 702 Walkaround through to Cardwell from the Gold Coast, and began an adventure that was to literally change our lives. We had so many first impressions it was hard to take in at first, and as we grew more familiar with the area, and discovered more features that were unique to Hinchinbrook, we became increasingly aware that there was a very good reason why this area has been declared part of our national heritage and a world ranked wilderness area.

In some ways, the 702 Signature was

both the best and worst sort of boat to take there because it became very apparent, very quickly, that as far as fishing in and around the creeks, "drains" and rivers in the area, it was a completely inappropriate craft for the purpose.

On the other hand, we wanted to circumnavigate Hinchinbrook Island itself, and in that context, the 702 Signature was magnificent. It was in its element, and as we went round the southern end of the Island off Lucinda and the sugar jetty, and started working back north up the coast in normal ocean conditions, we were very glad we were in such a well found craft. It was blowing a brisk 25 knots from the sou-east on that day (and for the next few days) and the sea conditions were quite rough, by any standards.

Having stopped overnight off Zoe Bay in a very roly anchorage, we got away early the following morning and worked our way right up to Cape Richards and back around to Cardwell, all the while appreciating the sure

F&B/Boatmag's Ruth Cunningham in her fave fishing posy - sitting on the Honda 15 as the Stessl 'slides' along under power from the Minn Kota electric up on the bow, operated by the author's right foot. As you can see, the conditions are glassy calm, and that's how it is for 95% of the time in Hinchinbrook's creeks and drains.

footedness and soft ride of the big Signature, and thanking the powers that be for ensuring that we had brought the Signature instead of the tinny we were initially planning to use.

This is the point. In our ignorance, we figured that you could do everything in a 4.3m, two-thwart tinny up there, and whilst it's true that you can cover about 90% of the western side (of the Hinchinbrook Passage) territory very well in a tinny, you can't if you want to go around the outside of the Island, or out to the inside of the Great Barrier Reef. This is a further 20 miles or so away to the east - and that's just to the inner edge of this vast

conglomeration of reefs stretching from the tip of Cape York, thousands of miles south to (approximately) Bundaberg.

This is the point of demarcation.

Offshore Seamanship

Boatowners and fishermen who are planning to go offshore need to acknowledge that what they are doing is (still) going offshore.

There is this fallacy around that the waters between the mainland and Great Barrier Reef do not get rough, and whilst that might be true of ocean gale conditions, let me confirm that it can get just as rough on the east coast (outside) of Hinchinbrook Island as any other part of Australia's coastline.

Worse, given the trade winds that blow up here around 25-30 knots for about 9 months of the year, one could argue that the water is actually rougher off the ocean side of Hinchinbrook than many other parts of Australia not subject to the influence of Trade winds.

But keep it in perspective; anybody that's going to run out to the wide offshore reefs such as Otter, Britomart, Bramble, Trunk (etc) can only do that in a substantial, ocean-going craft with at least a 200nm range, a very experienced crew, and a capable navigator onboard.

Again, the common folklore that you can navigate through these Barrier Reef areas on your GPS, is incredibly short sighted, not to say positively dangerous. Most of the area within the "Reef" itself, is a vast, bonmie (or "niggerhead") and reef-strewn "maze" and has never seen a hydrographer. To this day, huge swathes of the Great Barrier Reef are still marked "inadequately surveyed".

Bluntly, this means a newbie skipper can be charging along the ocean on his GPS, cleverly steaming between the major reefs - and drive straight over an uncharted reef that takes out the lower gear case of the boat's outboard with one almighty BANG!

The writer still recalls (with some chagrin) how we quickly discovered this to be the case on our first trip out to Otter Reef and

Why do the top fishos head out for the GBR every chance they can get? Here's why - veteran fisho Neil Dunstan with one of three 25kg (+) spanish mackerel captured off Bramble Reef, "And with 150lb of quality fish on board we left 'em biting!"

beyond, in *Dusty Rover*.

Dusty was a remarkably sturdy, safe and beautifully engineered diesel craft, and we had awesome electronics onboard giving us a superb overview of the area both through radar and GPS. In addition, the writer was navigating off the chart for the area (AUS 282) just because I like doing that, and it's hard to break a hard-won habit.

It was freaky how often we would identify a reef underneath us, or just beside us, or just in front, which wasn't on any chart at all!

As the reef dried out for low tide, many of them became obvious, but it was the ones you didn't see that would do the most damage.

Lost On The 'Reef

After an hour or so of working through the 'Reef beyond Otter and across to Duncan Reef filming and photographing this incredibly beautiful area (a miniscule patch of the GBR in the great scheme of things) we also made the disturbing discovery that we were, for all intents and purposes, completely 'lost'.

Sure, we had the GPS and knew our lat:long, but what we didn't know was whether it was safe to backtrack down our GPS trail to get back home, or take the roughly direct route back to Cape Richards, some 40nm west of Duncan Reef. At that stage, the reefs we touched going in, would be fully exposed or higher again.

That was also when we found out the hard way about not leaving it too late to pick your way back out of the maze when you've got to push INTO the sun. It was an extraordinary afternoon and we re-learned a great deal of commonsense issues about navigation on and around the Great Barrier Reef.



The Nine Creeks Of Missionary Bay

The jewel of the district - Macushla is the designated camping area on the eastern shore of the Bay, with white sandy beaches, undercover cooking facilities, shelter sheds, gas bbq and toilet facilities.

Macushla is adjacent to 9 separate and extensive mangrove estuaries. This area offers totally sheltered fishing, regardless of the weather.

I would suggest a ferry trip out of Cardwell to Ramsey Bay, (which is reached via No. 8 Creek) remain onboard and visit the next location, Macushla. This will provide you with an overview of the area, prior to daily fishing excursions, or a fishing visit of longer duration by camping over.

Whatever you do, visit Missionary Bay and take a camera. The scenery is magnificent, the fishing can be fabulous. Freshwater is available from No. 8 Creek. Whilst there is usually tank water at Macushla, supply is not guaranteed.

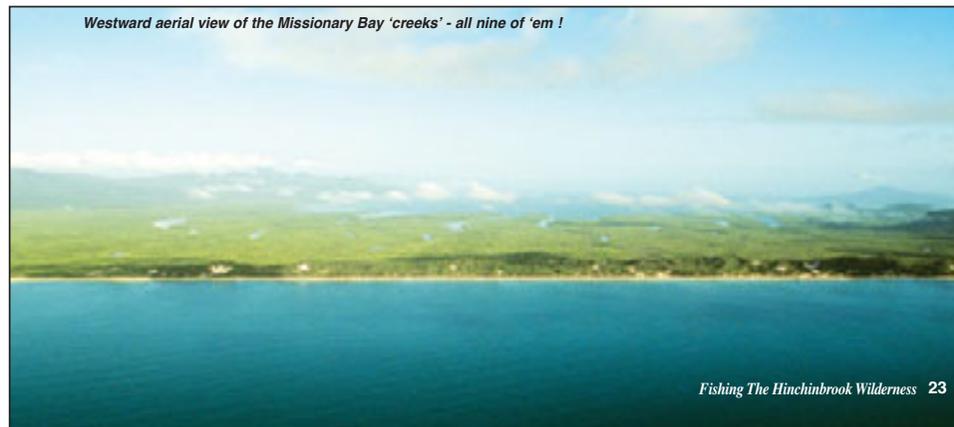
However, in a branch off No.8 Creek it's possible to drive up into freshwater. Further up by foot is safe swimming, or a bath, plus drinking supplies. Definitely worth a visit. The lowland rainforest is a welcome break from the mangroves.



Top Right & Centre: A very beautiful, sheltered camp site. Macushla does offer some shelter sheds, a pit toilet, and usually (but not guaranteed) fresh water. Permits are from Queensland Parks. Below: Cast netting off the southern beachfront at Macushla



Westward aerial view of the Missionary Bay 'creeks' - all nine of 'em !



Southern (Lucinda) End Of Hinchinbrook Channel

According to many of the very experienced local fishermen, the southern end of the Hinchinbrook Channel is where the best fishing will always be found, because it is directly involved in the confluence of the coastal tides off Lucinda, and the (daily!) ebbing 'smorgasbord' running down to the sea from the Hinchinbrook Channel and its attendant forest of mangroves – the definitive food farm for most estuarine species.

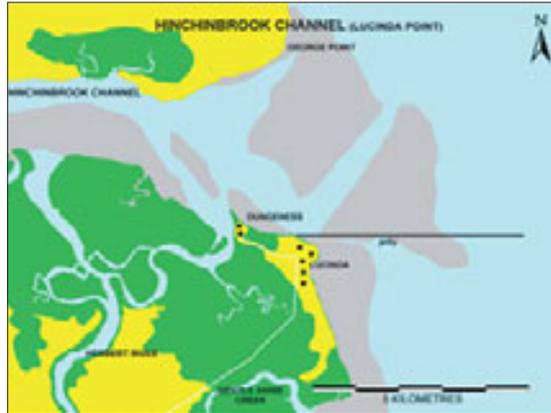
As you would expect, this movement tends to taper off the further you go up the Channel between the Island and the mainland, whereas down the bottom end, it's a daily occurrence through the normal tidal flow in and out across the Lucinda delta.

Added to this is the impact of two big sub-estuaries flowing into this area through the Herbert and Seymour Rivers, and typically, thousands of hectares of mangroves provide a vast breeding area for the fish and crustaceans running into the Channel.

This is an extraordinary resource that many believe eliminates the need to even go up to the Island from Lucinda, or fish anywhere other than in the rivers and creeks off the mainland.

In fact, the writer's been told on a number of occasions that little Gentle Annie Creek which runs almost along the main road into Lucinda, is renowned for some of the biggest barramundi ever caught in the district, no doubt a reflection of these unique circumstances of hectares of mangroves mixed with fresh salt water pumping in and out from the ocean every day, across thousands of acres of mudflats from rivers coming down from the mountain ranges to the sea. It is almost literally the perfect fish breeding environment, and no doubt the myriad side bar creeks like Gentle Annie, provide a natural hideaway for the predators watching

Herbert River flowing into the Hinchinbrook Channel near the Lucinda end.



the activity happening all round them.

Once again, the area is easily fished by small craft, kayaks and roof toppers, and as the boats get bigger their range and opportunities expand exponentially.

From Lucinda most of the bluewater Great Barrier Reef fishermen depart, using the excellent ramp at Lucinda and taking advantage of the 18-20 mile run out to Bramble Reef, the first major reef area to start bottom fishing.

It goes without saying that the mainland side of Bramble Reef is not going to fish very well being the closest to the boating community, but from here, it's only a fairly short run to start spreading your wings out into the Great Barrier Reef proper.

Thirty miles out puts the crew in some of the best fishing grounds in Australia.

But not that many people bother going out to the Reef – *kid you not* –



5.76 km FAD - the Lucinda sugar jetty



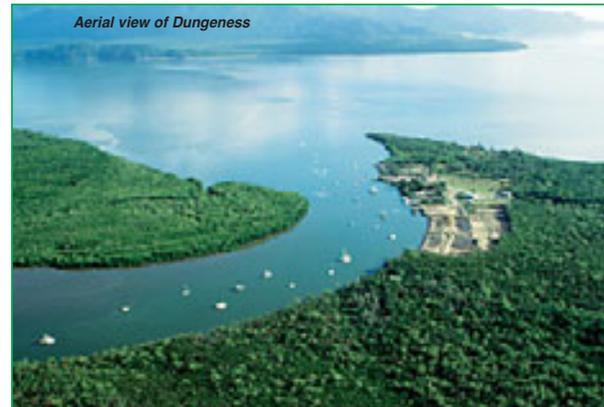
Just about everybody has trouble navigating the Lucinda entrance to the Hinchinbrook Channel. The best bet is to make your first trip at dead low tide, so you can see the channels, sand banks, etc, so you know what to aim for! After that, it's easy - as we found in our infamous grounding of Dusty Rover on one of our first trips to the region.

Footnote: The author was walking around this sandbank taking photographs for fully half an hour before one of the locals rushed over in his tinnie to advise that the bank was the local crocs' favourite solarium! OMG . . . !

because fishing along the enormous 5.8 km (2.6 miles) long sugar jetty is such a phenomenal fishing resource, one has to question whether it's worth the effort of going out to the Barrier Reef for really spectacular fishing. Fishing along the Lucinda Jetty – especially at night – is one of the most exciting activities a fisherman could ever undertake, and although it's always best to do it initially with a guide; it is extremely popular with the passing parade of grey nomads based at the nearby Wanderers Holiday Village van park and camping ground.

The southern end of the Channel is a truly amazing fishing area, and for people planning to visit the Hinchinbrook region it makes a heap of sense to be based at Lucinda, simply because of the variety of fishing that can be undertaken within a couple of clicks of the launchramp. If you want to, you can stay in entirely flat water for the duration of your holiday in this part of the world.

Has to be a near perfect fishing environment for small craft, and of course for larger craft, it is one of the best fishing grounds in Australia.



Aerial view of Dungeness

FHW

Getting Started: Fishing Hinchinbrook

with Bob Ford

Barramundi

Every visitor to the North wants a barra. Most want them, when they're least available - May to September, and don't know when to fish for them, where, or with what rig.

This section will deal with all matters that will give you the best chances. In May-September, effort by way of commitment of fishing time is essential. October-March, the task is somewhat simpler, more numerous rewarded - but it does cut right across the 'closed' season for barra, Nov 1st to February 1st. So to maximise your chances of nailing a good barra, plan your holidays at Hinchinbrook for October, or February and March.

However, to give you heart, many of the larger barra are captured in the more difficult colder water periods of May-September. Barra become lethargic in colder water,

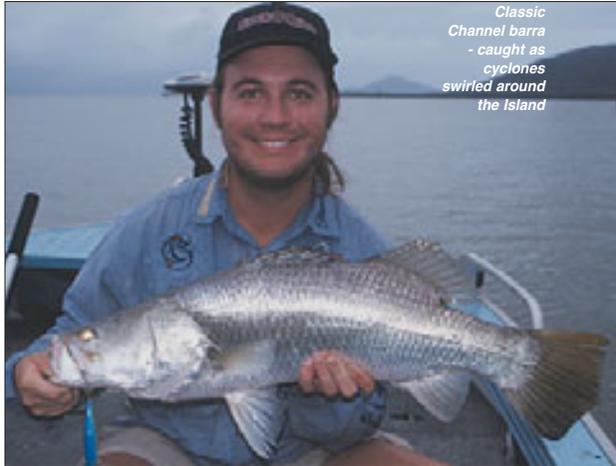
Heather Hamilton with another nice barra from one of the creeks.



travel in the early hours of the morning, 2.00 am-6.00 am and feed infrequently. When they do, they tend to take a single large fish and appear to take a long period to digest the catch before again feeding.

During the day they seek out shallow water, in direct sunlight, against protective cover, ie. mangrove roots, rocks, mud banks. Dirty or cloudy water is no deterrent to the barra.

They feed from one hour before low tide through three hours of the run in. That does not mean you won't catch them at any other tide time.



This is generally the optimum time to concentrate effort. Day or night.

Look for shallow water anywhere in the estuaries warmed by the sun, with cover for the fish. Fish live bait, or cast and very slowly retrieve lures with short stops and starts, cast repeatedly into these areas. Casting to the one snag or cover, up to 30 or 40 times may be necessary to induce

Why is the fishing so good ? Two reasons are obvious - commercial fish netting has been stopped in the Channel and breeding areas, and the region has thousands of hectares of wilderness mangroves, creeks, 'drains' and rivers that have been (largely) returned to nature.



a response. Personally, I'll back a live bait anytime over a lure, for results. The mouths of creeks, junctions and sand or mud spits are also excellent areas to concentrate effort.

The best rig is as follows - 8 kg mono or gel spun line. NO wire trace. Double the main line for about 30 cm, this is the trace required. A

small 1/0 medium shank hook is all that's needed. A small split shot lead 00 or small 00 ball sinker up to a # 2 ball sinker running on the doubled section of line only. Use a scrap of polystyrene as a float with a knife cut into which the line is wedged and wrapped around two or three times.

Hook small poddy's (up to 20 cm long) or herring just under the dorsal fin above the spine. Prawns, hook sideways through the body at the second joint from the tail. The depth of the float should be about half the depth of water being fished. A further rig on the bottom will also produce fish.

Barra are a very common fish in the Cardwell area. Hinchinbrook Passage produces many thousands of barra per year to charter boat customers. Many are released. Many barra are captured at the Wreck, over on Hinchinbrook Island, in sight of the Jetty.

If the barra aren't there, the queenfish, flathead and bream probably will make their presence felt. The vast majority of barra captured during the winter months are caught in the estuary areas most easily accessed by the Fishers Creek Ramp.

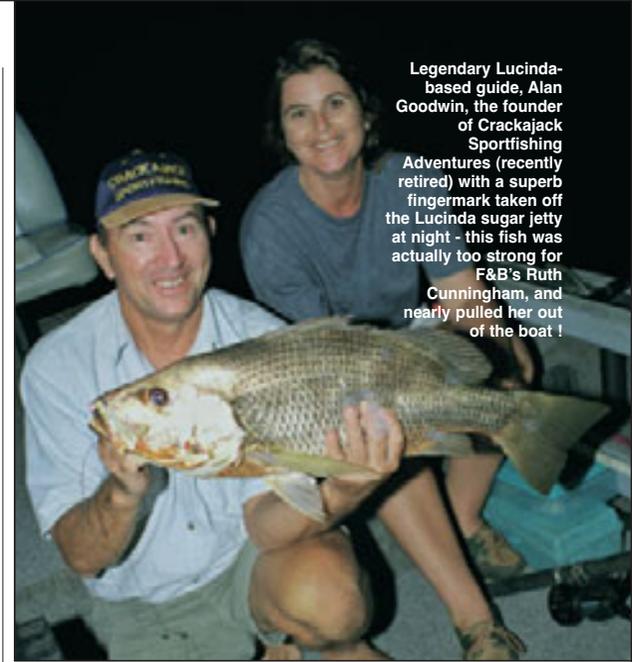
Troll lures - deep diving lures, such as 12 cm Killalure Barra Baits, Manns 12+ and 15+ bomber A15's Nillwater spearheads etc. Lures of the larger size 6" or 12-15 cm seem to produce very well.

Whilst trolling is the norm in the Northern Territory, casting and retrieving is more widely utilised in Queensland.

I quite often troll lures for excellent results. However, troll slowly, very slowly, along the edge of banks and dirty water lines, and past snags, and at the risk of a lure loss, through snags. Perseverance will be generally rewarded. If no barra are captured, other species, such as estuary cod, trevally, mangrove jack, flathead, and fingermark probably will be.

When fishing for barra, fish a reel with an extremely light drag setting, or in free spool. Barra suck in their prey (that's why the small hook). It seems quite miraculous, how, without even teeth marks, they can totally scale the live fish baits, expel the scales, then move off.

Time your strike for when the fish



is moving away from you. When you strike, thumb the spool and strike hard. You need to pull the hook from the bait and sink it into the barra's mouth in one operation.

Then play the fish on that light drag. Let it run if it wants, play the fish until it lies in a trance-like state next to the boat. This will occur in a lot less time than you may imagine. Probably, less than 2-3 minutes for fish of 10 kg. Larger barra tend not to become airborne, the aerobatics are usually the signature of fish less than 5 kg.

Remember to check the minimum and maximum size limits (at time of publication):-

- Minimum - 58 cm
- Maximum - 120 cm
- Bag limit - 5 fish per person.

Note the strict seasonal restrictions - Hinchinbrook (and most of Queensland) is closed to barra fishing from November 1st to February 1st - and these dates can be adjusted each year.

Barra is the best fish to photograph, not quite the best eating and definitely not the hard fighter it's

been promoted as being.

Fingermark

Proper name? Speckled scaled sea perch. Local name - fingermark, chopper, reddies.

This is considered to be the hardest fighting, best eating estuary fish in the northern tropics. And these sentiments are by no means just my own.

This is also one of the prettiest coloured fish to come out of estuarine waters. A fluorescent pinkish/orange sheen to the head and shoulders, with a dark blotch very evident when first caught, just before the tail. Each scale has a small darkish blotch hence the speckled appearance.

This fish is a live bait, or lure taker. Smaller fish occasionally take a strip bait, but captures of the larger specimens (up to 15 kg) are rare by anything other than live offerings.

A live bait in the vicinity of snags (fallen timber etc) will often be taken by this magnificent fish. He's a direct relative of the mangrove jack, which has a single sizzling run.

East Of Hinchinbrook Island: Bottom Fishing The Great Barrier Reef

with Steve Jones



We join Townsville fisho and family man Steve Jones for an overnight run in his superb Cobia 26 to the big reefs east of Hinchinbrook - for bottom fishing that is to die for . . . but remember, this is big water country, a long way from 'home and mother' so fishos have to be well equipped for the distances involved.

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

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

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 north east of Townsville, and east of Hinchinbrook Island. 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 area has been chosen.

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

