

QT sports editor and fishing fanatic David Lems recently enjoyed a rare opportunity to test the incredible waters off remote Groote Eylandt in the Northern Territory. Here's why it was an aquatic adventure worth sharing.

On board among the predators

Offshore trip offering feast of hot action

FROM the first cast to the final explosive feeding frenzy, this fishing trip was one to savour.

Spending a day in the vast, remote, predator-laden offshore waters around Groote Eylandt left me anxious to return.

The surface was bubbling with aquatic life within minutes of leaving the dock.

Birds were feasting on the baitfish, along with larger fish lurking below.

It didn't take long to find somewhere to attract a hit in the largely untouched Gulf of Carpentaria waters.

My opening cast was met with a thrilling strike.

Although failing to secure the hook-up, the excitement levels were quickly elevated to a new level.

It was a school of queenfish that ignited the early anticipation.

Heading further up the coastline on a Groote Eylandt Sportfishing charter, the next feeding frenzy was even larger with tuna the reward.

Tuna fight hard, especially when seizing a spinner flicked in their path. They simply can't resist when schooling in big numbers

turning the surface black.

Landing such a spirited challenger provided more optimism of what was to come, continuing the aquatic adventure.

Working off a rocky ledge close to an island headland provided more, almost immediate, action.

The queenies and trevally were eager to nail the lure cast into their territory. However, most hook-ups were met with a hungry shark circling nearby and ready to snatch your catch.

“I can't recall a session longer than 10 minutes where I didn't get a strike.

With so many options, the decision was to again venture on.

Having already made some satisfying hook-ups, it was time to journey offshore in the search of bigger predators like Spanish mackerel, cobia and perhaps a billfish.

While the highly sought-after billfish failed to take my many offerings, the mackerel action was exhilarating.

I can't recall a session longer than 10 minutes where I didn't get a strike.

Being out in such a vast expanse of water was a bit like fishing off Fraser Island. But Groote Eylandt fishing offers so much more, with a diversity of quality species.

Groote Eylandt is 600 square kilometres larger than the Queensland island familiar to many anglers. The Northern Territory offshore waters are a gold mine of opportunity.

At one point, both lines spun the reel with two barracuda smashing the lures trolled about 35 kilometres from the island's South Point.

Mackerel over 7kg continued to be the major sport before we spent some enjoyable time working an offshore pinnacle.

Lures returned without a fish often carried teeth marks of huge predators checking out what was dragged across the surface.



CLEAN HOOK-UP: One of the plentiful mackerel safely landed to keep for a feed. Many other hard-fighting fish were released to fight another day in the shark-infested waters.

PHOTO: DAVID LEMS

The higher level approach was changed to bottom bashing with more action within minutes of getting your jig close to the deeper-lurking fish.

Up came several reef species, including a prized coral trout, fishing on a boat called Warnindilyakwa Arrarra (meaning East Wind).

Other regular catches were a variety of cods, Moses perch, parrot fish and spangled emperor.

I counted more than 14 species while working a productive offshore shoal.

Watching the sounder confirmed what was suspected below – large clusters of fish staying close to safer cover on the ocean floor.

But it was the mackerel while trolling on the surface which provided the final adrenaline rush.

Preparing to head back, the sight was something to behold. A large mackerel took the lure and started jumping spectacularly out of the water.

It quickly became apparent why. Three sharks were chasing the



RELAXING BETWEEN STRIKES: Enjoying the comforts of fishing in a safe boat set up for offshore work.

PHOTO: DAVID LEMS

hooked fish.

As the shark fins broke the surface, the mackerel was devoured.

Unfortunately, I was unable to wind fast enough to land another hard-fighting fish. But seeing the

top of nature's aquatic food chain at its best was worth the 150km round trip, completing an unforgettable day in the Gulf.

Next Saturday: The charter operator with one of the best jobs in the world.



PRIZE CATCH: Among as many mackerel as he wanted to battle, angler David Lems caught a beautiful-eating coral trout.

Mackerel providing hot action on jigs in bay

➔ FISHING LINES

THE warmer weather seems to have brought the spotted and school mackerel back into Moreton Bay.

A few customers braved the less than ideal conditions during the week and bagged out on mackerel fishing around Curtain Artificial Reef and the beacons near Moreton Island.

If you are fishing with lures, a good technique is using micro jigs like the Gillies Pillies or the Gomoku slim jigs.

Using jigs is easy and anyone can give it a go.

Once the fish have been located by either looking for birds diving into the water or by using your sounder, let the jigs sink to the bottom and wind them back into the boat with varying retrieves until you work out which retrieve is working on the day.

Take a few different styles and weights to combat the current.

If fishing the beacons you will need to get your jig close as the mackerel often hang around looking for baitfish.

Many people will also float pillies down to the mackerel and this can often lead to bi-catch of kingfish, Spanish mackerel and the odd snapper.

Fish the same locations but keep an eye on the sounder and look for baitfish schools.

With the decent flush the rivers have received over the past few weeks and the hot weather, it is prime time to throw the crab pots in around the river mouths.

In the Brisbane River, the mouth of Boggy Creek and Breakfast Creek are producing some good numbers.

Check your pots every few hours to stop crabs eating all the bait and walking out.

If you find you are getting a few female crabs, don't just drop them over the side of the boat. Move about 50m

away and release them as it will stop them just walking back into your pots.

Bream are also making the most of the small prawns being washed out of the systems by all the recent rains.

Plenty of anglers have been getting stuck into them in the Nerang River and around the Pin.

Small shallow divers in prawn colours are working well or small soft plastics very lightly weighted will trick even the weariest of bream.

The Ecogear Breamer Vibes are working a treat in the deeper waters or where the current is very strong.

Baits of prawns or sea worms are picking up some good bream near the Gold Coast Seaway but you will have to pick through a lot of smaller fish.

Charlton's Bait and Tackle is having its annual One Day Sale today. Come in and say hi.

– Matt Osley (Charlton's Fishing at Redbank)

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