

Blitzing Brisbane

By Brett Craik

Midweek dives are the best, no boats to run you over, no loud engines to push the fish deep, the peace, the tranquillity, the smell of death ahh yes midweek dives are indeed the best.

After a late launch around 10am, we had to finish work first, we ran for just under one hour to the first spot, jumping over on some reef area in about 15 metres hoping to find some crayfish. After a few preliminary scout dives we found several antennae protruding from some enticing caverns, caves and cracks in the rocks. Being that the last time we had been hunting crays was in New Zealand where we had to grab them we were quite relieved to be back in the sunshine state where we are permitted to shoot em, 'good old Queensland' makes it easier for the ones way back up in the caves.

Dan and I got to work collecting crays, he was diving with a 55cm gun while I had my 1.5 Carbon railgun a significant contrast. For the most part I was merely painting the targets, with 20 metres visibility it was easy I would hit the bottom and swim around until the target was found then I would alert Dan on the surface of their whereabouts and down he would glide meeting me back at the surface a little latter, cray in hand. I found one cray that was protected by a large moray eel, I could only get the antennae of the crays as the whole body was hidden behind this slimy snarling beast which was more teeth than anything else, they seem to like living together along with the wobbygongs, personal bodyguards.

Meanwhile Doug was off in pelagic la la land, drifting with the flasher away from us. I think if we tried to take blood from Doug all we would get is blue water, he has well and truly taken that path to blue water hunting where there is no turning back, reef fish just don't hold the same appeal for some of us. To his credit by the time he had got back to the boat he had shot about 5 reef fish including a nice mangrove jack, gold spot wrasse and purple cod, that was in addition to several mackerel a mixed bag of Spanish and Spotty Macks, with one of the Spotty's being taken from a school of 50 – 60, it would appear the ban on commercial netting of this species is paying dividends.

While glory boy was off having fun Dan and myself were hard at work reef scratching in 15 metres which gets bloody tiring after 40 odd dives. On one particular dive I had hit the bottom and was approaching a cave when I could here someone yelling loud enough to startle me, so I decided to surface to find out what the hell was going on. I had ascended to within 5 metres of the surface when I felt a tap on my shoulder and there was Dan pointing at two Spanish Mackerel which were doing laps around us, I quickly turned and headed back with vigour descending very quickly on an intercept course closing the gap before creating a rapid incision mid body courtesy of my 2 metre steel shaft. He was small around 8 kilo so with that shot I knew I could not lose him, I watched as the Mack sailed off dematerialising into the mist when suddenly I realised that I had come up and gone back down at speed and I was now a little bit stuffed to say the least, a quick trip to the surface and some fresh oxygen was just what the doctor ordered. As I pulled in the Macky a third one came in which was about 5 kilos larger, Dan made a mock dive with the .55 gun well I assume it was a mock dive, now that would have been funny.



By now we had reached our boat limit of Crays and with Doug 'Macky killer extraordinaire' back at the boat it was not hard to predict where we would go next.....Deep and Blue.



We headed straight out smashing through the light chop until we found some bait activity, we could see small Mack Tuna leaping everywhere it was on. Climbing over each other as we tried to get in the water we were met with walls of small Mack T's and fusiliers all of which appeared scared and excitable we would learn there was just cause for this paranoia. Within minutes Wahoo began approaching from all sides with the visibility at 25 metres and even more horizontally, great to have that in our favour, we could see these ghosts materialise on the horizon. One large Wahoo came in a little closer he was massive around 35 kilos but Doug chased in vain as the hoo evaded him, I had barely turned with the camera when Dan slammed another one creating all sorts of havoc and confusion as the float was thrown into hyper speed then momentarily becoming a submarine torpedo as it travelled 2 metres below the surface. Dans attempt to freestyle after the float was like watching a race between a turtle and a hare, I don't even know if Thorpe would have had a chance. The boys continued the pursuit in the boat catching it as the wahoo began to drastically tire, with the fish now in sight we could see the spear was about to fail so a second shot was required. Dan descended with the second gun....miss....Dan reloads underwater...Dan misses....Dan surfaces...Dan reloads...Dan misses a third time, by this stage the wahoo was so tired from flinching to avoid every shot we could pull him up and dispatch him with ease anyway, now sporting several grooves down his face. As luck would have it every shot came out clear as day on video, providing many opportunities for ridicule over and over again and a good blooper reel. Dan's defence 'boys where's your 23 kilo Wahoo' a just response I guess.

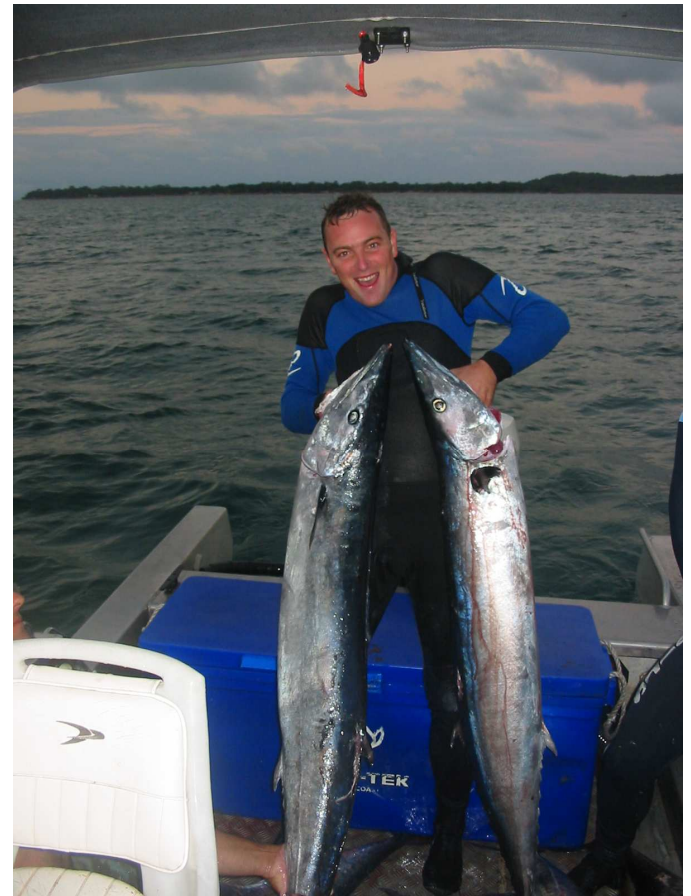
The second drift began with Doug immediately slamming a 30 kilo Wahoo, unfortunately the explosive run right past Dan's head was so strong that it tore free after pulling the float under, Doug's spear was now scrap metal. Doug jumped back in the boat to find a new weapon while Dan and I wound up in preparation for the next drift, as luck would have it just when we had wound up everything 5 yellow fin tuna came cruising in a mere 15 metres below us, they were mostly around the 20 kilo mark, dipping and sliding back down into the blue expanse as if they never existed.

Back up current we jumped in a again just knowing that we were going to see Wahoo on this drift again, I tell ya that's a fantastic feeling and provides a constant adrenalin flow. With bait frantically feeding all around us it was just a matter of playing the waiting game,

suddenly the bait veered to my left as in came another impressive Wahoo, he was a fair distance from us but I dropped anyway and gave chase. Now I have seen this situation 100 times before the Wahoo glides effortlessly away waving its tail in an arrogant 'up yours' display, leaving me to hit the surface puffed and pissed. Well not today my purchase of new carbon fibre Picasso blades for deep hunting now provided another use, rapid speed. The chase began like any other the Wahoo began moving away with the not in a million years look in his eye. I began rapidly closing the gap when the Wahoo looked back his expression changed to a more of a 'what the?' this produced a rapid flight response the fish shot straight upwards then banked and performed a complete 180, I also matched these movements in the spirit of a dogfight but at the expense of more time. I was now chasing a Wahoo upwards for the first time, it looked incredible as it headed straight into the sunlight like a lunar rocket. My fuel cells were running too low so I passed the baton on to Doug as he entered the fray continuing the pursuit. Unfortunately Doug was now sporting a 1.2 metre railgun a mere peashooter against these fish in this type of water so he was unable to close in for a shot, I am certain if he had his 1.5 back he would have taken him down I guess next time we will have to prepare some rigged up shafts in reserve, lesson learned.

I swam back towards the flasher when in the distance a school of approximately 15 Cobia came up to less than 10 metres from the surface, I have never seen them come up in water this deep before. They were impressive too all around 15 – 20 kilos a whole wall of them, but alas they only made a brief appearance before descending out of sight.

The next drift produced immediate action, we jumped in prime for more excitement straight away a line of four Wahoo were spotted on the horizon, they were too far to chase but some quick thinking from Doug helped change the situation. Doug yelled to his father whom was the boatie pointing frantically where he wanted him to drive, the skipper responded by flooring it to head off the Wahoo. It worked perfectly the Wahoo turned away from the noise and vibration of the boat, now we could see an intercept was on the cards. Doug dipped and slammed a very large Wahoo, he landed a perfect shot mid body right near the lateral line, but sometimes perfect is not good enough, the Wahoo exploded almost vaporising the water around it and leaving behind the spear, we figured it must have been flopper failure another lesson always maintain ya floppers. The remaining three Wahoo had now spooked a little but I could still see them hanging back about 2 metres under the surface. I was swimming parallel with them but they were so far away I knew I would not win this game, I needed to change the rules, I needed to make them play my game quickly I devised a plan now just to enact it. I dived under the surface to about 2 metres (on level with the Wahoo) then I began kicking rather strongly horizontal initially running parallel with them but then beginning to head about 30 degrees away from them while looking now and then back through the very corner of my mask to monitor the response from these magnificent fish, not looking at your prey particularly Wahoo such a captivating fish is very difficult indeed but I had to stick to the plan. Sure enough they changed tact and began a course that would cut across right in front of me while holding their single file. Out of the corner of my eye I could see they were about to cross but I was now completely stuffed after an aggressive swim and had to go kick up for a breath. The first Wahoo was now right in front of me so I thought why not, lined him up and whack! but just as I fired I was hit by a breaking swell, the perils of firing from the surface, the spear lodged into the fish further near the tail than I wished. Rather uncharacteristically this fish ran deep and not very fast nor strong just doing some big arcs for about 5 to 10 minutes before rising to the surface again I could see the spear was looking a little frail then wham off he went like a bat out of hell the float smashed into the back of my head before I knew what hit me, the force or pressure caused the spear to tear free, most disappointing. Fortunately just as I had reloaded a nice Spanish cruised in so I thought I'll take that instead, descending quickly and placing a nice safe shot, ya gotta love the Spanish so much easier to spear.



The next drift provided no shortage of action, a large bull shark moved in underneath us I dropped down to investigate if he was carrying any passengers, nothing on board but down deeper on the reef several green jobfish were hanging around I dropped further now at 20 metres I tried to position for a shot but these are some of the smartest fish and today they were too smart, just as I was about to surface I noticed a strange spectre approaching in the distance, I was expecting another bull shark but as it materialised I realised it was about 15 cobia all around an eagle ray they were around the 6 kilo mark. I targeted what I thought was the biggest, and placed a good shot but these cobia sure know how to fight they don't often run preferring to twist and writhe. I would have loved to stay and fight but I was out of air and had to find some, leaving the cobia unattended on the bottom this was a critical mistake as I departed I could already see he was smashing things up on the reef, by the time I hit the surface he was gone.

At this point Doug and I interchanged camera and gun just as I noticed 3 Wahoo approaching I tugged on Doug's fin and then pointed to the closest one, Doug plunged down on

the fish releasing the shaft a solid shot and off he went. Five minutes later he was hanging below us still holding a bit of fight, dodgy second shot Dan was sent down to dispatch him, as Dan approached the fish a further Wahoo came in this one was a lot bigger Dan made no mistake. With two Wahoo on and myself being armed only with a camera it was the perfect timing for a 25 kilo cobia to say hello, damn! oh well I guess we did okay.

The light was now fading and we had a sanded up bar to get through so we quickly took some pics and off we went, and with that the blitzkrieg was over, well for now anyway.