

Long Weekend

By Brett Craik

Ahh blessed be the long weekend for it grants the opportunity to feed the addiction just a little more, well it beats working anyway. Since a mate of ours had joined us from up north whom had been dry docked for quite some time, we seized the opportunity of a long weekend to get a couple of days diving in Brisbane. The conditions being a northerly wind on a ESE swell didn't bode well for a settled stomach, I think Dougies body subconsciously sensed this and took action even prior to us getting offshore, chunks were sent flying forcing Daniel Skinner and I to take evasive action, that was an ominous sign for the rest of the day.



Upon arriving at our first drift dive location we could see it was not going to be as bad as initially thought, that was a great relief. The first couple of drifts were a little on the quiet side with a few schools of rainbow runners hanging around, Doug did manage to pick up a medium sized cod from a cluster whom were hanging around in 20 metres and a nice parrot too, while Daniel Skinner got flanked by a Spaniard whom just held enough clear water between its fleeing tail and the Skinman's out stretched gun toting arm. Other than those few moments of interest there really was no reason to hang around a move north was next on the cards.

Finding some deeper water we began a series of drifts in a slight current, the winter months tend to see the East Australian Current (EAC) slow from around 4 knots to 2 knots and this sees the numbers of pelagics drop-off dramatically while this is disappointing it does however give rise to more concentrated reef spearing which is always fun and challenging.

I was drifting along in about 18 metres of water with approximately 25 metres visibility when I noticed a nice jobfish was hanging around almost directly below, it was acting a little weird doing figure eights staying just below me in the same spot. I looked over to see Dougie already had a tusky on his line which was hanging half way down his rig as his shot must have penetrated the swim bladder sinking the fish, I thought perhaps the jobfish was looking at that as I have seen similar behaviour when a dead fish was nearby before. Enough thinking 'times a wastin', I yelled out to Dougie since I was only holding a camera at the time, I expected the fish to take off before Doug had a chance to get down there but no it just kept holding its position. Doug descended quietly and I tried to stay on him with the camera however I was a little reluctant to pursue him too closely as I did not want to blow his chance, in retrospect it probably would have not mattered as he was able to close in and approach the fish once hitting the reef. The jobbie then turned and began to slowly move away but the decision had come too late and the fish was now skis kebab.

I had swapped the camera for a gun on the next drift giving me the opportunity to have a look around the reef for a change, it did not take long before I began chasing a few parrots around, that can be annoying at times as the colourful tasty fish often just remain out of range and in these open low lying reefs in clear water it is almost impossible to ambush them unless they happen to be feeding with their beaks down in the coral. Towards the end of the drift I descended quietly to find myself lying on the bottom in about 18/19 metres when I began to pan around to notice a jobfish was passing by. It was clear to me if I just put my head down and waited he would not come back to me as he was already heading off so I began to pursue him. The jobbie was pushing



more of a gap between us when suddenly out of the top of my mask I could see two African Pompano (Threadfin Trevally, I think?) the fish were up above me at about a 45 degree angle, having heard that these trevelly eat okay I aimed upwards towards the head of the fish and let rip smashing through the gill plate. The trevelly ran hard and fast, I did not want to get a bent spear from a trevelly for the shame factor so I let it go for much longer than I would have for a wahoo or Spanish. I was quite content to let the fish totally kill itself although in doing so it created a slight problem as a rabid whaler came in aggressively seeking a feed. I began to try and haul up the fairly large trevelly which was still giving me a fair bit of stick they are quite strong and the flat shape of the fish now lying broadside was giving me great resistance making the retrieval slow. The shark was continuing to circle the wounded fish getting closer and closer on each turn, but as is usually the case the shark was too cautious and waited too long so I was able to pull it into my arms and despatch it quickly before heaving it into the boat and safety. The shark disappeared as expected once the fish was gone; however Daniel Skinner slugged a nice parrot on the next dive which was creating a fair amount of ruckus, with scales and guts flying everywhere. Suddenly four sharks aggressively appeared; they had no doubt become attracted to the area from the trevelly only moments before and were now concentrating their efforts on securing a mouthful of the delectable parrot fish. Their bravado however lacked integrity as Doug proved by hanging next to the fish as it was hauled up, the sharks even although in greater numbers than the divers still backed down, cowards! It does make you think what exactly these sharks see from time to time that makes them so cautious and lacking in

confidence...hmmm... I guess one day we are going to find out, so much to look forward to.

The boys and I began to wind up ready to change locations for despite spearing a few fish we were not satisfied with the fish life on that reef it was insufficient to sustain the excitement and adrenalin levels addicts such as ourselves require. They had just

jumped in the boat first and I was fully wound up just watching a bull shark which was circling at just 3 metres when I caught sight of another shape from the corner of my vision it was a lovely wahoo! I screamed to the guys in the boat to throw a reel gun, which they did quickly but wahoo only give you a couple of seconds to work with at the best of times, this one was no exception as the sleek and slender creature of grace tailed off into the distance leaving me powerless to stop it, damn.

We had already made the decision to move the wahoo could not change that as we now turned our interests to the shallow and hopefully cray infested reefs to the south of our current position. Pulling up some 30 minutes latter we were met with average water, a greenish 10 metres not ideal but in the same instance adequate for the task at hand. Finding and extracting the crays did prove to be more time consuming than we had initially predicted, they were spread far and wide and it was real exploration trying to find them. The extended search did in-fact provide the benefit of some exciting new spots not only for crays but also the potential for future forays with a gun, finding new spots is just gold.

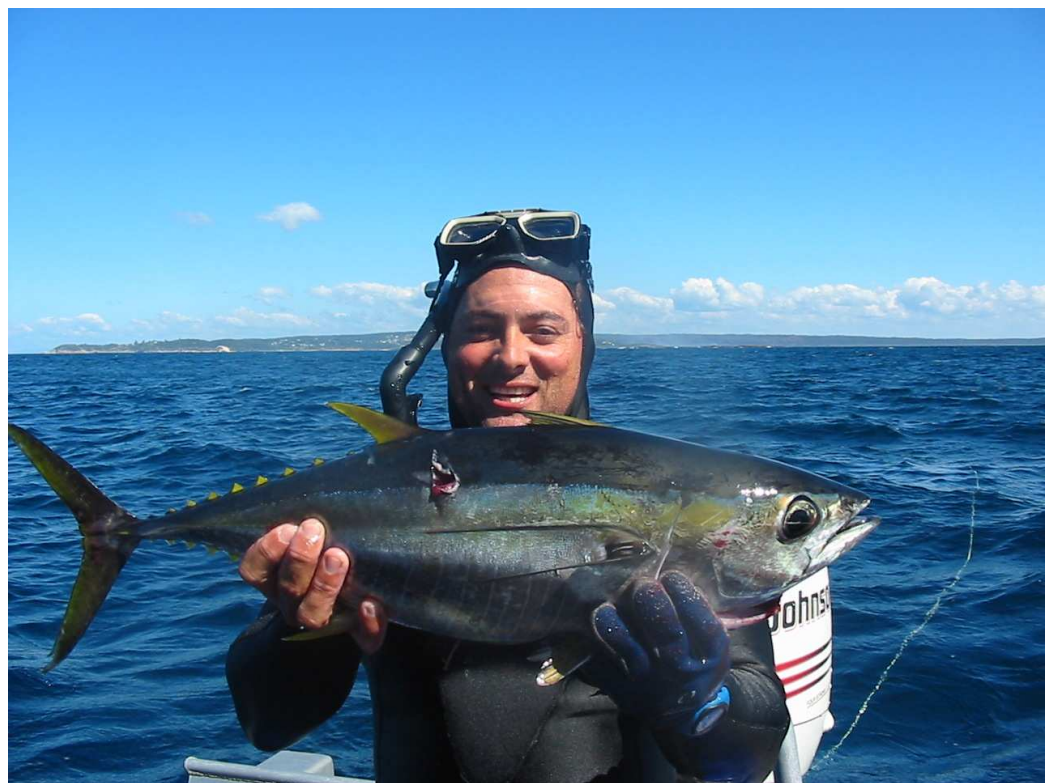


As the time past and the crays began to mount in the boat we were approaching our boat limit only needing a couple more when I just happened across a large crack in the rocks which opened out the other side as some light was penetrating through. I finned over and on closer inspection I could see the crack was much bigger than first thought the reason it appeared smaller was due to dozens of crays that were blocking the light from getting through. Most of these crays were small although there were two nice ones which interested me. Being armed with a 1.2m reel gun I was not interested in taking a shot knowing that Doug had a cray gun with him he would be better suited to the task, back to the surface for me. Back on top I instructed Doug where to dive and where the crays were, the bottom being about 12 – 13 metres down it was a little difficult to explain due to the visibility, however I thought it was clear enough, subsequently I was proved wrong as Doug dived down in a different direction. Being slightly impatient I thought stuff it I'll do it myself so I headed down and landed in front of the ledge where I momentarily surveyed the

scene picking a target when suddenly there was a blast as a shaft came flying through the crays and past my shoulder! It was Doug he had been motoring around on the deck and had found the location even after going the wrong direction in the first place; he also had a .8 rabitech not the pistol cray gun I had originally thought. That was a close call, admittedly the gun was only small and probably would not have done any significant damage but I bet it would have hurt like hell, so in retaliation as Doug rose I returned fire by sending my shaft back through from the other side stringing a large cray in the process, the small crays didn't know where to hide they were being attacked from both sides. The whole event was witnessed by Daniel Skinner whom was just above us and could have predicted what was going to happen, it almost ended up being a tug of war at 12 metres through a cave, he was thinking 'now now boys break it up, no need to shoot each other'. The two crays topped us up and we were off as a howling northerly blow had just started and we had to head north, it was going to be a big slog home not that I minded too much as we had achieved a good catch and we had another day to go.

Unfortunately the next day out on the water was not to be for the Skinner as he was stripped of his manhood, I guess he ran out of brownie points, rest his soul. Daniel Hanning had also fallen victim to the same affliction. Yes only Doug and I only headed out with our manhood intact to take it to the wild blue. The wind was strong but we were not going to be tamed by a few white caps after all this was a short ram raid only a couple of hours is manageable with just a boatie and a diver in a drift dive situation.

Getting out there I placed Doug in the water at the normal start location for a normal current but today the current was moving across the reef on a different angle, consequently Doug missed the target pinnacle and was sent way off to the side. Realising this I motored over picked Doug up and began heading back to a revised drop point when suddenly something spectacular happened, something I have never seen before. In an instant the entire ocean erupted as thousands of flying fish began leaping in the air it was happening in every direction as far as the eye could see, there were so many they were out of control several hitting the boat, landing in the boat and one even struck Doug in the head. We had just happened to be there when a massive feeding frenzy had began, and this went on for hours, it was unbelievable! You would see ten in one pack leap clear of the water but as they hit the water wherever they hit the water, three or four would get smashed to pieces, there were just so many tuna they could not get away. Doug was eager to get back in I didn't blame him and I allowed another turn since the first drift was a screw up. Within moments watching from the boat I noticed him descend and reappear quickly, he yelled out "got a yellow fin!", the fish was almost stoned as it came flying into the burley Doug taking the shot at a piece of burley prior to the fish striking, the little tuna move so damn fast it really is the only way to get them. From the boat it was strange as the gun had floated to the surface while the tuna did very acute circles, Doug then grabbed the spear and lifted it in perfect timing to see the tuna leap over the pontoon and onto the deck of the boat. As the fish lay on the floor of the boat quivering I was reminded of not only just how spectacular looking they are but I was also reminded of just how much of an prized enigma these fish are albeit this one was a little miniature of the giants that spearos all around the world chase and



dream about capturing. I bled the tuna in the boat although I didn't realise they go like a firehouse, blood went everywhere it was amazing, if not a little sickly looking.

It was my turn in the water now as the feeding frenzy continued, the visibility in the water was not actually that great but I did immediately see dozens of Mac Tuna fly past on a rampage and a couple of yellow fin I knew it was going to be difficult to pick the yellow fins out let alone get a shot off. I continued to drift and dive but it was not until the burley began to sink around me that I had a chance at a shot. A yellow fin came in, at the time there were about 5 or 6 pieces of burley he was after most of which were flying fish that had fallen into the boat all cubed up now, it's fairly efficient when the burley jumps into the boat! The yellow fin took all but one of the pieces of burley which just happened to be the one I was aiming at, they seem to know what is going on but temptation proved too great as he came flying back in, I had to watch the fish so I could work the timing while at the same time hold my aim this is very difficult to do. The tuna now approached and I let fly prior to the fish striking the burley my timing proved to be correct as the spear penetrated



however my aim was a little off as the shaft entered the fish high, a second problem was that the tuna was strung on the mono, this was cause for concern as 2mm flexible mono cuts through flesh far easier than 7mm of inflexible steel. Sure enough after a very fast and powerful run almost straight down the mono cut back through the flesh and tore free in a matter of seconds. I reloaded and continued the drift knowing that I was going to see plenty more action, and I was correct. The tuna kept flying in but they were moving fast and it was having trouble trying to isolate any yellow fin, by the time I had moved the gun in one direction they had moved to my flank or my back, it was frustrating so I decided to give up on that and hunt the reef below.

The water was quite dark down deep but several large spangled emperors were feeding on the few pieces of burley that had made it through the voracious schools of tuna, in-fact I almost had to shield the burley to get it through. The spangles were not allowing me to get close enough, they would seemingly amber along just until you thought you had a chance then they would amber a little deeper and deeper always staying about 2 metres from range. I did have a similar problem with a couple of jobfish whom were playing exactly the same game, still I can't really complain without the burley I would not have even had the pleasure of seeing such fish.

The incredible amount of activity going on all over the reef had as expected awoken several bull sharks, in the darkish water I was seeing a couple on every dive. They didn't really stand a chance of clamping down on a tuna but I still had the feeling they were expecting something. My next dive I slowly descended into the dark levelling out at 22 metres when I began to

scan the area, the reef being a further 7 or 8 metres below me. As I spun around I had the unfortunate experience of facing a bull shark as it approached me its proximity alarmed me enough to see me almost involuntarily swing the gun around in defence for a pending collision. Luckily the shark veered away at the last moment avoiding the spear tip, I spent some time watching the shark back off slightly before I had to return to get some air. Rising to the surface must have showed me perhaps as a more vulnerable target, because the bull shark decided to follow me all the way back up. Looking down between my fins I could see a rather large head leading a swaying tail, sharks always look quite different when you see them square on compared to the usual view from above, they almost seem more solid and nasty looking. Five metres from the surface the shark broke away and headed back down; I think it was just being territorial.

Back at the surface the tuna raids had intensified and as a result the flying fish saw me as potential protection. A few of them clung to me much like remoras, I was able to look down and even stroke the wings of one fish, something I never would have thought possible they were just that petrified of the tuna, it certainly was turning into one of those days I will remember forever.

The action continued as on the next dive I got a look at some tuna, flying fish, a spangly, a turtle and a couple of sharks it was all happening, then as I was heading for the surface I looked up to see a wahoo almost directly above me. I have never pointed my gun for the sky before so it felt all wrong, but I managed to put the spear right through the 15 kilo fish sending him ripping through the water, as hit the surface I could see Doug right next to me in the boat he was on the mobile talking to Daniel Skinner telling him all about the day, perfect timing for him as he let him know I now had a wahoo on, suffice to say Skinner was not a happy chappy. Unfortunately the line went slack thereafter and upon retrieval I noticed the mono had broke, I was gutted never had that happen before in-fact the rarity of the occurrence is probably why I had failed to check the part of my equipment for quite some time. Interestingly the mono did not break on a crimp rather the loop onto the spear, it must have become worn from the mechanism and additional pressure would have been placed on it due to the peculiar angle of the shot being from below. Gear maintenance is all too easy to overlook, but if you do it will come back to bite you in the arse like that.



Apart from that late disappointment it was all in all a top day although we got hammered on the way back, the wind decided to go directly to the west and strong. Not that Dougie cared he was buoyant after all he had just shot a yellow fin on his birthday which is not a present to complain about, plus we beared witness to an event the likes of which we may never see again. Squadrons of flying fish being shot down and annihilated, what a day! What a weekend!