

Mixed Bag

By Brett Craik

As the week drew to a close the attentions of my dive mates and I turned away from the mundane crap of general city life to the possibility of some extreme underwater hunting. The marine forecasts and dive reports around the Brisbane region came in as favourable and it did not take long for the phone to start ringing hot and just like magic a crew was born, no pressgang is ever required around here as we all have the spearfishing disease I think it may be terminal.

Departing the ramp at 4am we faced the standard one hour run to our hunting grounds providing ample time to reflect on last weekends diving, plan tomorrows dive, contemplate how many Spanish we were going to nail today and generally hang a whole heap of crap on one another.

A fairly calm ocean greeted us with an early morning sparkle as the sun began to slide up over the horizon, we entered the water to face 25 metres vis a magnificent blue and crystal clear, diving in water like this makes you feel like your flying in the sky.

Beginning up current of the reef we wanted to drift, we quickly ascertained that there was in-fact almost zero current so the boat was positioned over the shallowest point and everyone began finning in that direction. It was a bit a blow to our hopes of some 'Spanish lovin' with the current gone, but what can ya do, our attentions now turned to the reefies below.

Quickly we established the best mark on the reef a 22 metre pinnacle with a sharp drop falling away to almost 40 metres. From the surface we could see a bunch of saw tails milling around just above the drop as they usually do, and on the reef itself several sparkles like fireflies caught the eye as the reef baitfish were going about their business. There was enough activity to raise our expectations of seeing something worth shafting even before anyone had made the first dive, that is the beauty of clear water.

I happened to be the first to make the drop as I was freefalling to the bottom some movement flashed in the corner of my vision, Jobfish! a huge school of 50 or so fish all larger than 5 kilos, some over 10 kilos. Unfortunately the very second that I looked in their direction they shaped to turn holding this position just long enough to assess me as some form of unknown threat then they gave a few of those rapid whipping kicks that only jobbies do, behaving like large baitfish, and then they were gone. I did have time to notice that the larger ones moved a little slower and also had a darker and duller colouration, something to remember when trying to identify the larger targets from a school. With the jobbies out of range and being that it was a little too deep for me to hang around too long I made a hasty retreat to the surface.

Over the next 30 minutes or so Daniel skinner, Doug Hanning and myself had made repeated dives on these fish as they continued to hang around but they were outsmarting us, Skinner did manage one shot but it fell painfully short. The jobbies were definitely winning the battle and all looked lost until we called in the boatie reserve whom just happened to be Tappies Joubert the South African Sub.

After making a warm up dive to check out the reef Taps prepared himself, he was going to take the fight to the jobbies. Taps hit the bottom in 25 metres, he had noticed the jobbies moving on the fringes as he had approached the deck so now it was a matter of waiting, could he outwait them. He waited and waited, meanwhile Dougie levelled out about 15 metres above Taps to get a front row seat of the show that was about to unfold. Eventually the jobbies anxiety dropped and perhaps their curiosity was beginning to take hold after all they knew full well he was there its not like you can hide yourself anywhere on these reefs. They began to move closer and closer seemingly unaware of the pending ambush, maintaining a low profile was critical to the hunt Taps was laying motionless making sure his eyes were not seen by the jobbies this is almost as essential as having a great bottom time when hunting these fish. Taps was not looking yet aware of where the school was, as they finally began to pass in front of him, he quickly assessed that only the smaller ones, which were still quite large, were closest the bigger ones were at the back out of range so he made the decision to let them pass and he continued to wait! The school continued along the ledge then turned a 180 to make another pass right in front of Taps again only this time the shot was on, we could hear the shick as the shaft was sent flying followed by some flashes as the jobbie thrashed around but only briefly it was a good shot and he tired quickly. Taps was now allowed to return for oxygen replenishment, a job well done. I finned over to watch as he retrieved the fish from the surface, as he hauled it up it just got bigger and bigger, the official weight taken on the scales in the boat was 9kg an excellent fish.





Taps and myself took some photos back in the boat while the boys continued to press on. By now the jobbies had received the message that they were being targeted and had moved on. Fortunately several large rays had moved over the reef carrying with them some nice cobia, they were not giants but still a respectable size. They too were behaving a bit on the wary side but not as difficult as were the jobbies to approach. Skinner did everything right getting himself into range they were zipping and zagging all over the place in a flustered manner as they often do but the Skinman managed to place an acceptable shot on one of them but the fish still managed to throw the spear. Skinner was most pissed after that, he has a cobia curse with many hardluck stories regarding this species he continues to be haunted, I believe one day he will exorcise his demons, but until then its still something else we can give him stick about.

After scaring the living hell out of the entire reef, we decided to move to some shallower ground to check out the scene once more. The first drift was largely unproductive, Dan Hanning did pick up a small kingfish but nothing else appeared, with this in mind we changed the start of the drift next time round.

The flasher was deployed set at about 13 metres and we waited patiently ready to strike anything that came underneath us. I happened to be looking to the side of the flasher when something flashed in the corner of my left eye, I turned to see something quite astonishing, a bird was making a dive on the flasher! I quickly alerted Doug who was right next to me and we both watched in amazement as the bird continued

his descent stopping only about 1 metre above the flasher when it realised it was not what he was after, makes you think how deep can they go?. Then gracefully with the greatest of ease he ascended, some surreal ornithology to add to an already fantastic day.

Back to the hunt as the drift continued, when just then a large school of Spanish moved in both Skinner and Dougie and myself plunged after them, the sight of three large black shapes hurtling towards them must have spooked them as they made some rapid turns away both Dougie and Skinner pulled out but I pressed on supported with a good pair of fins I knew I was going get one, it was just a question of what size. Sure enough one eventually turned and I was presented with a shot on a smallish mackerel, a few minutes later he was sitting in the boat next to a wide eye Taps (he loves Spanish).

I continued on in the drift and had made a dive to around 15 – 20 metres looking in a cave when I decided to come up taking a glance above me as I moved off the bottom when I noticed a school of silver grey fish above me, instantly I thought barracuda as I have been underneath many schools of them before but no these were Spanish I was underneath them and they didn't know it. Rising off the bottom to get a shot my fin scrapped the reef immediately giving away my position, the Spanish began moving away. I could see their soft white underbellies such a tempting target but they kept moving away into the current, I was chasing them on a 45 degree angle upwards it was rewarding in itself to be chasing them from such an angle I had not done that before. Eventually I took a shot but fell short, Damm oh well.



It was my turn in the boat next drift as is required at times, its kind of like jury duty nobody wants to do it but they are obliged to do so. This time round Taps finally had his chance a small wahoo presented itself not far below the surface taps struck it towards the back end not a great shot, would it hold? The fish ran very hard trying to get away but rather foolishly he tried to fly past the most accurate spearo I have ever dived with (Doug Hanning) he reacted quickly pulling a hip shot which unbelievably stoned that wahoo dead cold right in its tracks. Its not the first time he has done that I swear he was either a Texan outlaw in a previous life or perhaps a gorilla who liked throwing bananas at other gorillas for fun, I am betting on the latter as he still resembles one.

In quick time the boys then managed to pick up two tuskfish in about 20 metres out the back of the reef before we headed into shallow water a secret spot in about 5 metres of water where the boys picked up a haul of crays also in very quick time. I tell ya dougies GPS/Seamap is fast becoming a priceless secret weapon, it is more deadly than the gun, I look forward to watching its database grow in the future.

Thus ended another top day with reefies, pelagics and some crays to round out a nice mixed bag.