

Snapper Surprise

By Daniel Hanning

When the moon is full a series of strange and peculiar phenomenon happen under the waves of Brisbane. Firstly the crayfish seem to gather in numbers crawling out from their rocky fortresses in an orgy of feelers, secondly the elusive snapper magically appear from an unknown whereabouts.

Hunting snapper in these waters is exceedingly difficult, with visibility frequently in excess of 20 metres and with no kelp or large boulders to crawl around or hide amongst it can truly be a test of one's patience. It is on the full moon when the odds of us landing one are much better as not only are there just more around but they will hang in shallower water for some reason I have also heard this happens in winter when they seek the warmer water of the shallows on top of the reefs.

First up we decided to try and work a shallow ledge hoping for a couple of reef fish to warm the pallet. Straight away the boys including myself noticed a few smaller snapper hanging off the drop but we could not see any bigger ones yet, so we speared a couple of other reefies to keep the family happy.

After finding our fins so to speak we began pushing deeper and deeper searching for prey it didn't really matter what species so long as it was big, there is a slightly competitive streak amongst all of the pod now that we have developed and honed our skills as underwater hunters it seems the bar keeps being raised each time we hit the water.



While we were plugging away in the deeper water Doug made a surprise decision to head into the shallows, this would prove to be a shrewdly decisive decision as Doug came across hoards of frightened bait. He crept around the shallow reef trying to sniff out whatever was terrorising the poor baitfish, when suddenly those fine black bars appeared yep you guessed it Spanish Mackerel. Doug the marksman assassinated the Spaniard in one crippling shot to the spine, the fight was null and void from the start.

The other boys and I vented our frustrations for we had been working our arses off out deep while as we saw it Dougie frolicked in the shallows, Taps in particular was furious he was diving the deepest but it was probably more the fact he can't stand seeing mackerel on any other spear than his own.

The fish in the area were now beginning to behave a little skittish not surprising with Doug around so we made a move to another reef, a reef we knew had a nice drop-off from about 10/12 to 18/18, nice and shallow so we could hopefully spend some time and try to sniff out some snapper.

I was in the water before Doug, I made my first dive off the drop it was hard to see the bottom due to a thick school of sawtails eventually I pushed through them making a hole all the way to the bottom when I looked up to encounter a startling sight of at least 100 snapper! They were in one massive wall moving along the bottom of the ledge I could not believe it I had never seen so many before, they varied from probably 3 kilos to a few which I believe would have been pushing up to 10 kilos. My surprise turned to disappointment as the mass of flicking blue tails moved wide of me, there was no way I could hide from them. Upon surfacing I could see Doug was now on his way down as we both continued to work the drop for the next 30 or 40 minutes. The entire time we were there the massive school of sawtails remained right underneath us, there were so many of them it was actually hard to



establish other fish in a mass of confusing silhouettes. I was trying to adjust my eyes at the surface to see through the ever moving sawtails when I noticed a different style of movement below them, unknown to me at that point I decided to descend slowly using the school as cover to get close to whatever it may be. My descent took me through the school eventually the last few sawtails moved out of my way revealing a lovely 5 kilo snapper and I was very close. I could see a couple more hanging back and of course they were bigger but I could not give up the surprising proximity to the fish I found myself in that would be reckless, I squeezed the trigger and the rest is history. Back up top Doug commented, "where the hell did you get that?" To which I replied you just got to pick em out. I passed the snapper to Brett and continued diving, I was hoping the others would come back.



The snapper had vanished but to top off the day on two consecutive dives when I was right next to Doug in the water I managed to pick up two nice mangrove jacks, I was thrilled. Doug on the other hand was not so, he matched me for each dive only to find the similar looking red bass a no take species on the bottom, oh well that's life, he already had a nice fish anyway. After taking a few pics we decided it was time to take these quality fish home, the oven awaited.