

Summer in the Shallows

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The few shallow reefs around Brisbane for the most part are wastelands devoid of life when compared to similar reefs of similar depths I have dived elsewhere. Sure you can pick up the odd good reef fish and pelagic fish do traverse these zones but they really are few and far between, you really need to work to find fish here or have luck on your side. However having said that there is a small window of time when the productivity of these reefs significantly picks up, that is of course the warm summer months, the perfect time for a foray into the shallows.

Crashing through the bar we were surprisingly met with a very flat ocean on the other side a runout tide always makes things look worse than what they really are. There is usually a moment of elation when all the crew realise the conditions are favourable, now it's lets see about the vis.

Doug and I jumped in at the first spot a pinnacle rising from 30 to 20 metres, the visibility was superb we could clearly see the bottom and there was little in the way of particles it was crisp and clear. Our plan was to briefly try this deeper spot before heading in for some shallow reef action since the water temp here was around 26 degrees we thought there might be some action to be had on the inshore reefs.

The pinnacle was strangely very quiet there was not much in the way of baitfish just a few sawtail surgeons milling around as per usual but not much else. Doug and I had a quick look under a few ledges around 21/22 metres but they were empty too so it was time to make a run for the shallows.



I jumped into our first spot a cave in about 12 – 14 metres we are quite fond of, Dan sporting the .8 Rabitech he was ready for some Crayfish action. It's always the way when you grab a short gun you end up wishing you had a longer gun with you, a sentiment reiterated by Dan as he approached the cave only to have a Mangrove Jack swim straight out past him. Dan chased the fish with me behind him tracking it left and right as it moved about quickly obviously keen to get back in the cave but Dan was unable to improve his proximity to the fish enough for a .8 metre gun. Both Dan and I surfaced together while I looked down to notice the Jack had swam back into the cave I could tell this was going to make for an interesting game of cat and mouse.

Dan called to Doug in the boat for a longer gun, he went with a 1.3m weapon this time and quickly was back down in front of the cave looking for Mr Jack. The fish appeared right in front of him closer in-fact than the end of the spear before it moved into another dark corner of the cave making a shot impossible. Dan surfaced and gave it another go and another and another this went on and on each time he would see the Jack but each time it would be moving too much or get behind something that he couldn't extend upon him. Eventually it was Dan's ear's that gave way and the Jack has some respite although this was only temporary, the calm before the storm as the Jack's next opponent Doug Hanning hit the water with a crash ready to take the fight to him. I continued to film the entire event as Doug pressed into the cave three or four times himself but this was proving difficult as there was not much light for the camera, eventually I cut my losses and continued to look around the other side of the

cave for Crays in the small cracks. I had located a few small ones when I heard a shot and looked over to see Doug pulling the fighting Jack from the cave, he had finally done it! Not a big Mangrove Jack by any standards but it was just a memorable hunt you experience moments like that as a spearo.

With the Jack in the boat the attention was to switch back to crays since I had seen a couple of smaller ones, Doug would stay in the water since Dan was now experiencing a painful headache from pushing it too hard. Doug pointed a ledge out to me he was going to have a look at, we know the area so well now that we could probably draw up blue prints for it, both Doug and I suspected we would get one from this ledge. It is a very rewarding feeling to descend on a ledge with that sort of confidence then to peel around and get that first glimpse of those legs. Doug had a brief look at the Cray making sure there were no others around then he lined it up still with the 1.3 metre gun choking the rubbers to reduce complications. One down and it didn't take long to find another, before long we had four in the boat. Normally you don't get too many Crays around in the middle of summer.

After I had spotted a Spaniard cruise past the attention then switched once again back to fish since it was all the encouragement Doug needed, interestingly the Spaniard had a most definite spear wound on it from a previous encounter you think he wouldn't have past by me so close, they just never learn.





The reef was alive with activity, plenty of stuff to keep us interested I had exchanged the video for a still camera to photograph some of the life there. From Maori Cod to Moses Perch and the ever present sawtails milling around far more activity than usual like a summer breeze bringing life to countryside it was the East Australian Current pushing through filling the reef with life it was a pleasure to dive there and be part of it.

We spent the next few hours exploring a vast area looking for something special, it was a case of jumping in the boat a lot and stopping every now and then based on the advice of the sounder. As we continued to scout I stumbled across a big school of what we can blubber lips they are the crapest of the crap fish big and dumb they move in slowly until they are very close to you with a droopy mouth and big clueless eyes. You have to wonder if it's the influence of man that has seen these docile fish become more successful as a species by removing everything else around them that

tastes better, luck of the draw rather than evolution. I only think that because that was exactly what my intentions were as I noticed a large Tuskfish was sitting in a crevasse underneath these big dumb brutes. I was only scouting at the time so I called over to the boat for a gun, holding my position above the school of blubber lips as an untethered gun crashed into the water next to me. Quickly I loaded the weapon and began my descent to the reef 12 metres below



as the blubber lips encased me. I moved through the school and noticed a 3 to 4 kilo Tusky in front of me, he was a nice fish but the Tusky I had seen from the surface was much bigger and I knew he was just ahead over the crest of the raised section of reef. I slowly kicked forward and began to climb over the raised reef with Dan's 1.5 metre gun primed with a brand new virgin spear was extended as the fish began to come into view. The Tusky now catching a full view of my approach suddenly realised that something was not right he was being hunted and began responding by lifting from his stance and assuming a position like he was going to make a bolt for it. The range of the gun was more than enough to slam into the side mid body style sending the fish on a crazy run, tough foe the old Tusky's. It was then I remembered that I did not have a rig line on and had to fight it, fortunately for me the Tusky ran straight into another crack in the rock and got himself wedged, while this was fortunate for me it was unfortunate for Dan as his brand new spear which took the full weight bearing load of a strong frantic fish. Fighting against itself the fish was very quickly tired and I was able to un-wedge it and swim to the surface, my



first words being "sorry Dan". Hauling the fish on board we had a fair catch so decided to have another quick look out wide before heading in which turned up with nothing, it was the warm shallows that had turned in on today.

