

The First Wave

By Brett Craik



Spanish Mackerel are undoubtedly one of our favoured fish to hunt in the offshore waters surrounding Brisbane. They tend to inhabit these waters between late December and April with a few hangers on still around in May, they are not like the wahoo which come and go quite quickly. Diving outside of these seasons at times feels like you are just going through the motions, waiting for the real thing. Being that it was only November we were still eagerly awaiting their arrival.



The day began typically as we worked a ledge in 14 – 20 metres in adequate visibility and it did not take long before everyone was hitting the deck scanning for prey. The area was covered in Estuary cod, not a particularly exciting fish but the eating qualities are okay so the guys picked up a couple for a feed. On one dive chasing these cod I spooked two mangrove jacks from underneath a ledge, back at the surface I alerted the other guys whom commenced an immediate bombardment in the area, you could say mangrove jacks rank a little higher than cod. It turned out to be all in vain as they jacks slipped away into the night. With the bottom still covered in cod and not much else we lost interest and decided to move on running past some other members of the freedom divers club whom were out for a spear too, just as we went past Robbie from Adrenalin spearfishing had landed himself a nice cobia weighing in at close to 30 kilos.



After trying a couple of our other cobia haunts where we only seen one flighty fish so we moved to another ledge which was holding a lot of bait with a nice current. As I dropped the guys up current they drifted over a school of sawtails, Dan whom has been crowned the snapper king had noticed a couple were hanging beneath these

sawtails. Using them as cover he made his approach very quietly sneaking closer and closer until he pushed through the school and found himself within range, a quick squeeze of the trigger saw the snapper's spine smashed in two and the rest is history, a nice little specimen. As Dan pulled up the snapper it was quivering as stoned fish often do, this motion sent out enough signals to attract a kingie. The kingie came flying in very aggressively and had a crack at eating the snapper! It was amazing the fish was far too big for a toothless kingie to consume; it really is a jungle out there. Doug reacted quickly and was able to sneak within point blank range before shafting him, makes it easy when they are distracted. Now with the knowledge that there were snapper around we immediately started running burley on the next drift. I joined Dan on this drift and we watched the burley sink down, when suddenly a shape appeared underneath us my initial response was trevelly then I blinked and took a second glance, no it's a large snapper around 10 kilos,



Dan had spied the fish too and had made a dive on it but he was too switched on and wasn't going to fall for any of our tricks.



The mad Frenchman now wanted a kingie too so on the very next drift we found a sacrificial lamb that sat right up on the flasher and let him have first go, that kept him busy for quite a while giving time for the other guys to chase the parrots and some jacks hiding in the structure. The drift continued over the ledge and up onto the shallows where the burley began to create a fair amount of activity from the smaller inhabitants of the reef. I decided to have a bit of a look around just in case something larger decided to come in to dominate proceedings. Lying on the bottom I waited in hope for something to approach me, then just as my bottom time ran out and I was about to leave for the surface in came charging a large goatfish, he was zipping all around me eyeing me up obviously looking to see if I had stirred up any food from the bottom. I normally would not bother with goatfish their eating qualities are great but they are usually too small this one however was considerably larger than most I see so I had to introduce him to the end of my spear, he had a fantastic colouration too coming up bright purple in the photos. After spearing the fish I caught sight of another school of large goaties these ones being bright yellow but they would not let me get close at all to them perhaps watching the clinical assassination of their mate may have filled them with dread. After boating the goatie I jumped back in with the still camera to take some pics on the colourful reef, my

timing was impeccable as a whole school of trevelly passed over my head giving me a good angle to work with.

For the next couple of hours we worked pretty hard spearing a few quality reefies and seeing plenty more, but we still had a yearning we just had to have a look for wahoo, you never know so you just have to try, a change of location was ordered.



Upon entering the water we were met with a completely slack current, thus significantly reducing the chance of seeing wahoo but we were already there and dressed for the occasion setting ourselves on the nearest drop off and in the 25 metre vis started first hunting for some burley, if it wasn't going to happen we were going to make it happen. Before long a sizable barracuda cruised in but didn't cruise out as Doug smashed his spine saving his shaft from a possible bending. With the cuda now being hacked up and a nice trail making its way down to the reef, it did not take long for a response.



Two trevelly came flying in, one was white the other completely black I had never seen a black trevelly before and was interested to see how they ate, only one way to find out. The shot was good but he still fought like a madman, later that day on the plate he came up pretty tasty, so if I see another he is going down. Doug then handed the cuda to me and I continued hacking and adding to the trail, Doug now ridding shotgun on the burley fest. Next up to the plate was a school of rainbow runner, Doug let fly and stoned one of them at max range, and when I say max range I mean max range the fish just fell off the tip of the spear and began to sink down to the bottom 20 metres below. Doug was not concerned as we were in clear water with no current so it was only going to take one dive to get it back. As Doug quickly reloaded (no going down without a loaded gun), a jobfish came up off the bottom and was now swimming down following the falling runner. Doug was now in pursuit, he likes jobbies but then who doesn't with a few strong kicks behind him he was rapidly closing the gap. The runner found its resting place on the deck while the jobbie stood head down tail up directly above the dead fish just staring at it. The jobbie was mesmerised remaining there just motionless while death approached from above, you can't help but wonder what it was thinking it certainly could not eat the runner because of its size. By the time the fish realised Doug was a threat it was all but too late as some cold steel was already on its way. Doug continued down after spearing him to collect the runner before dragging up the jobbie.

The burley was continuing to work wonders, I was busy working the knife when I heard a shot and looked down to see Doug frantically pointing below him, he already had Spanish on that much I could tell but he was now pointing at two more passing by just underneath the flasher.



Both PJ and I made drops down on the two Spaniards, I quickly assessed that I could not close the gap and pulled out PJ on the other hand was closer and continued with the dive while I watched from the surface. PJ reached a the same depth then embarked on a horizontal crusade as the macky made a big arc at close to 20 metres, PJ matching him the whole way, it was a marathon effort eventually he closed the gap enough to unleash a solid shot and the rest was history.

We continued to run burley in the area but we only succeeded in attracting three pumped up whalers, the almost spent barracuda was lowered down amongst the scavengers whom promptly tore it to pieces and devoured it putting on a fantastic show in the process. By that stage there was not much else going on, anyway the esky was beginning to become a little on the heavy

side so we decided to call it a day. More pleased about the small Spaniards than anything else as they were not due yet, not due but early arrivals are always welcome.