

# Murramarang: south coast magic

THE South Coast of NSW is blessed with some pristine, postcard-perfect locations, and I just returned from one of them: Murramarang.

It was good to see both visitors and locals out enjoying the sublime looking Mills Beach and surrounding waterways. A group of dolphins also like the area – a huge delight to families staying in the area. Seeing them is always a good sign: they eat fish too!

A closer look with an experienced eye would sometimes reveal what they were feeding on, and it included whiting, salmon, tailor, rock blackfish, squid and, best of all, cuttlefish!

Dolphins love ripping into the soft stomach of a cuttlefish and they often leave the rest, which is soon swooped on by other fish.

Effectively, the dolphins do the burley for you and if you're lucky enough to have a "floater" drift in close to where you're fishing, the chances of a snapper off the rocks or beach is multiplied by 10. On rare occasions you can see snapper thrashing around as they tear off a tasty piece of their favourite cuisine.

This happens a lot along the south coast; so keep your eye out. Anglers with kayaks and boats can go cruising specifically for floaters: anything with some flesh left on it is worth a cast from upwind and well back.

I had a very quick fish from the Kayak with Ray Smith, and fishing off Wasp Island we easily rustled up half a dozen salmon of about a kilo each, and Ray got skunked by what was most likely a good sized snapper. Kingfish have also started to show as the currents start to warm (it went above 18 degrees at times.)

With the warm-up done, and reports of floaters on the headlands in the area, my friends and I were mad keen to give the snapper a proper tickle up the next morning, but to our disappointment the seas came up.

However with a kayak on your car's roof all bases are covered so we hit the shallows of nearby Lake Durras instead. Like many shallow lakes along the south coast (eg St Georges Basin, Burrill, Conjola, Tuross, Wallaga, etc), with just a little know how Durras can be flathead city in spring. And this proved to be the case again.



**KNEE DEEP IN FLATHEAD!** The best spring flathead fishing in many lakes is right up in the shallow backwaters where big boats can't venture.

My fishing buddy in the tandem Hobie was Eric Meppem, a keen kayaker and fisher, but he was new to lure fishing in estuaries so I suggested we use some shallow-running hard-bodied lures and specifically cast across the flats for flathead. Best results were found in one to two feet of water, and in the easier to fish spots a cast in any direction was into shallow water.

When the breeze is up one really good strategy is to cast downwind as you drift. This way you get a long cast with the ultra-light lures and each cast is in a new spot, plus there is no belly in the line making for a better retrieve and positive hook-up ratio.

Just remember to wind faster than the boat is drifting to keep the lure moving. Lots of twitches and rips to keep the lure working hard works a treat on flatties at this time of year.

If it calms off you can cast to features like small beaches in the tree line, gutters and snags. You don't need to land too close to the snags: this is flathead fishing 101 and a snagged lure will only cut into your flatty time.

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Trolling also works, but casting is better, and it is extremely helpful to have a kayak that you can move and position without a paddle - an electric motor or better still a mirage drive that can be used in super shallow water.

We caught a good bag of flatties in a couple of hours, and Eric got his PB, an 84cm specimen that gave him a huge fight in just 50cm deep water! We let the big female breeders go, keeping two nice 45cm specimens for the table.

Flattie tails are hugely popular with many families, but I am finding the thicker parts of the fillet are best cut into little 2cm thick medallions so they also cook fast. Save these for the adults as they will have bones.

There is not much better feeling than catching and cooking some fresh fish for your friends and family.

Rob Paxevanos

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