Estuaries brimming with bait

Stuart Hindson  |  February 2017  »  Area Articles / New South Wales / South Coast / Narooma /

The holiday crowds are slowing up with school holidays over, but for those who are still in the Narooma region, some exceptional fishing is still on offer.

The local estuaries are red-hot at present and this will continue for a few months yet. All species are playing the game, with anglers fishing bait and lures getting amongst them. The beauty of Narooma is that there’s five different estuary systems within 20 minutes both north and south of town. This helps anglers, with a variety of options to fish, and if one system is a little tough, there’s another around the corner. It’s the same when crowds become too much, you can always find your own bit of water and get results.

The smaller systems like Corunna Lake to the south and Mummaga Lake to the north of Narooma are both excellent with ample fish available. Both these lakes are firing for flathead and bream at the moment, with lure anglers getting better results. These estuaries are quite shallow in nature with maximum water depths of 6m at the most. This is perfect for flathead, as the shallows warm up quickly, especially after a few hot days with the afternoons being peak times.

I’d be concentrating in 2-3m of water around the rocky points with smaller soft plastics or soft vibes for best results. You can expect some solid bream, especially in Corunna, with both black and yellowfin bream on the cards. Both these systems are full of prawns too, so casting a few smaller surface presentations will also see some nice fish caught.

Up at Wagonga Inlet, it is firing nicely with flathead, mulloway, bream and tailor all chewing. This place is loaded with frogmouth pilchards, with Forsters Bay absolutely chocker with them. It’s been a long time since I’ve seen this much bait there, but with the bait comes fish and this area is a good starting point to fish the system.

The interesting thing is that we have outside visitors in the lake in the form of kingfish. Kings! And plenty of them. We’ve caught a handful of kings to 68cm and seen plenty more following lures up. I know quite a few have been caught, with the best at 74cm, which can be pretty good fun on the light gear. Don’t get me wrong, they are hard to catch and you need to be lucky and in the right spot at the right time, but if they start smashing bait on top and you’re in casting range, then you’re in for a shot.

Kings aren’t the only fish eating the pilchards, as there’s XOS tailor, mulloway and some pretty good flathead and snapper down deep under the bait, just waiting for the scraps from the pelagic species. I’m not sure how long they will stay there, but if the water remains warm and the bait stays there, it could be months, so it’s worth a look.

Further upstream in the shallower areas around Punkella Creek has seen some very big flathead caught. I know of several fish over 90cm over recent weeks. You can expect a few trevally and bream as well, with the edges along the oyster racks holding plenty of fish.

Cast surface lures or smaller sub surface hardbodies to the edges over the rocks and weed, but screw that drag up a little to get them out before they brick you.

Offshore, the kings have been good at Montague Island with jigs, live bait and squid on flasher rigs working well. The fish are quite widespread, but the northern end has been okay. Despite this, a lot depends on current as to their whereabouts. Having a good look around with the sounder and looking for feeding kings on top is the key to getting fish.

The kings aren’t huge, averaging 3-4kg, but still a lot of fun and great on the plate too. There has been the odd better fish mixed in with the school fish, especially when they’re on top chasing bait. Casting big poppers at them is a stack of visual fun, and the best way to tempt one of these bigger models.

Further offshore the marlin action is in full swing, and black and striped beaks have been plentiful, with trolling and switch baiting both working well. Most crews are getting a shot or two a day, so not red-hot action, but enough to keep you interested. The traps in 70-fathoms off Tuross has seen a lot of the action, though a few smaller blacks have been hooked at Montague, so it’s worth a look there as well.

For those targeting the eating species, both sand and tiger flathead are in awesome numbers. It’s not hard to get your bags with some quality fish amongst them. The flathead are quite widespread, but water depths of 40-50m have been good. The slightly deeper water has accounted for the majority of tiger flathead. The reefs and gravel edges are holding some good-sized snapper to 2kg, lots of morwong, and there’s also kingfish on the cards, especially up north off Potato Point. Striped tuna strips, squid and larger soft plastics have accounted for the majority of fish.

Anglers fishing the beaches and rocks are in for some fun with all the usual suspects playing the game. Most beaches with a half decent gutter have plenty of bream and whiting with Brou Beach just north of Dalmeny being a standout. This beach is around 7km long, so finding good water to fish isn’t hard, though you may need to walk for awhile. Using live beach worms or pipi will see plenty of action, with a lighter running sinker rig the go.

Closer to Narooma, the better beaches to fish include Bar Beach and Narooma Main. Both these beaches have deep gutters close to shore and are certainly worth a look.
For the rock hopper, Mystery Bay and the golf course rocks in town have been good for the pelagic species. Bonito, salmon, tailor and smaller kings are all possible, with smaller chromed slices or whole ganged pilchards the go. Early morning draining tides the better time to fish at present.

Images

Some monster flathead are getting around our local estuaries, like this cracker fish that Pete Steward caught, which was released.

Pete and Rob with a few fish caught on surface lures. These were part of 40 odd fish caught for the day.