February is a top month

This is the time of the year we all have been waiting for. All the signs are there for a bumper period, which should provide plenty of crabs, bream, whiting and flathead.

CRABS

Blue swimmer crabs are prolific at this time of year, and appear readily in anglers’ catches. There is a definite run from February through to April, and then again in August when they pay a brief visit. The best areas to find crabs are between the Captain Cook and Tom Uglys bridge along the northern and southern foreshores up into Kogarah Bay and on the weed beds, Woolooware Bay down to Towra Point and along its foreshores.

In the Bay itself, just about the entire area will produce crabs, with the stretch off Ramsgate Baths and at the end of the airstrip an excellent location to set your traps.

Know the Fisheries rules because you never know when an inspector will pop up. Each fisho is allowed four witches hat traps. For example, three anglers working from a boat are allowed 12 traps. Each trap must be adequately marked as per regulations. Traps can be set day or night with no restrictions to the area or setting. Cooks River and proclaimed Marine Parks areas are the exception.

When selecting a bait to be placed in the trap, I’ve found some of the most successful include fish frames of luderick, mullet, trevally and tailor.

Always set your traps out of the boating channels, otherwise losses will be quite heavy. Allow enough cord from your trap to the marker for tide variations. Check your traps about every 30 minutes. If you are not getting results after an hour, move to another area and reset.

Crabs are found in both slack and fast running tide, but they do not like a fresh after rain. They disappear and return when the water is clear again.

One way to distinguish female crabs is that they are smaller in size with the underside apron more round than that of the male. Female crabs should be thrown back.

Crabs should be cooked dead rather than alive. We all have our ways of cooking, but I like to wash the crabs in freshwater then cook in a boiler with a mixture of freshwater, salt and sugar. For a dozen crabs, allow 1/2 cup of sugar with 1/3 cup of salt to a suitable boiler filled with fresh water. To this, add 1/3 tsp of cinnamon, which really enhances the flavour, but don’t overdo the cinnamon otherwise the crab becomes too sweet. Bring to a boil, add the crab then turn it down to simmer. After seven or eight minutes take the crabs out, place them in crushed ice and you have a meal fit for a king.

BREAM

Bream catches have been on the improve, with most parties catching fish up to 30cm. The larger fish have been coming from the oyster leases area in Woolooware Bay and Pelican Point.

If you’re fishing around Towra, I would suggest the run-out tide as the better option, especially in the middle of the channel. The best time is the last couple of hours before the bottom of the tide. Live prawns that have been scooped up in the system are the best bait, and they rarely fail to score. We’ve been getting plenty of prawns from Fitzpatrick Park, Picnic Point Boatshed and Cattle Duffers Flats, and the average size has been exceptional. I like to place the hook through the tail and let the prawn swim around.

The bream have been biting with gusto and have been fairly easy to catch. Bloodworms have been accounting for the school fish. They are at a premium price and can add a considerable expense to your day’s fishing, but they are a must for a top catch.

Live nippers are another top bait. You can pump them along Douglas Park Flats and on the south side of the Tom Uglys Bridge and have no trouble getting 50 or so in quick time. Chicken marinated in fresh garlic cloves then rolled in Parmesan cheese also works well, especially for the larger specimens.

The sand flats in front of the San Souci Sailing Club are definitely worth a try. I have been getting my half dozen bream to 35cm on a regular basis, and have also been successful with whiting and flathead from the same location. There are three green channel markers in this area, and the best method has been to alternate between them after catching two or three fish in one spot. The schools of fish are not huge, so if you pluck a few from the group, the others become very wary and finicky so it pays to move 50m or so. I like to fish the contour of the flats, and if you’ve got a good sounder they can be found easily.

Avoid berley if you can, as this will bring unwanted creatures around the boat. Small toads have become a nuisance and are showing a liking for fluorocarbon leaders. Ensure your line isn’t frayed or nicked as this will make you lose a good fish.
Stingrays are part and parcel of this kind of fishing. You will definitely catch some. This is their mating season and they become very aggressive, taking baits meant for other species. They usually bite more readily at slack water, so it may pay to drift for an hour or so and try to pick up the odd lizard.

**FEBRUARY FISHING**

Going around the bay, the drop over in front of Inscription Point at Kurnell has been rewarding for bluters, bream and tailor, with choppers up to 45cm taken on floating pillies. There is no set time for them to show up but they seem to favour the incoming tide.

The artificial reefs in Congi Bay have been yielding plenty of calamari squid, which have provided plenty of bait for kingfish and snapper seekers.

Schools of tailor have been marauding the area along with salmon and bonito, and while they’re not premium quality tucker they provide a welcome by-catch for the family.

Good size kingies have been hanging around Molineaux Point for a few weeks. The best method has been to find the school on your sounder, downrig live squid to the desired depth, and slowly drift between N 157 and N 139 stamped on the retaining wall. This system works!

Around the buoys of the new runway there are plenty of smaller kings being caught on hardbodies and soft plastics. The S Factor scent has been working a treat. A little wider of the buoys there are trumpeter whiting around the 27-28cm mark. They don’t get much bigger but there is no size limit, only the bag regulation applies. They make good eating and take peeled prawns.

The tongue at the entrance to the Georges River has been productive for school bream, which have been averaging around 28cm. The last few hours of the incoming tide have been the best, with strips of marinated chicken doing the job.

The Mountain, in the middle of the Georges, has been fishing well for mixed species, including the odd cobia which is most unusual for this section of the bay.

As mentioned earlier, the prawn run has been outstanding in the upper reaches, with the Alfords Point Bridge to Mickeys Point being the standout stretch. Chipping Norton Lake has been the best location, with excellent catches of bass to 45cm taken on Tiemco Soft Shell Cicadas in the bee colour. If you fancy a bit of freshwater fishing, Liverpool to Cambridge Street Weir has been superb, with the ski club location providing the better class bass.

Whiting have been a little on the slow side, but I believe the best time to chase them is at night when they move onto the shallow sand flats. The small rivulet along the mangroves between Towra and Bonna Point has been providing elbow slappers to 27cm, and you will not find many bigger. They are very cagey, however, and require exceptional skill. Use only 2kg long leader and leave the bail arm open on your reel if you want to catch them. Use as little lead as possible and live squid or blood worms.

Land-based, a few good whiting have been taken from Washington Drive in the Wonnie, with night time being the best time. Just make sure you take the Aerogard if you’re fishing this location. I’m told a few big muddies have also been trapped between the mangroves in pristine waters by the locals.

Big estuary perch have been taken on the Needles shoreline on live prawns slowly worked near the structure.

Cooks River has been providing a few good whiting near the Grand Parade road bridge during the run-out tide at night on bloodworms, and trevally have been prevalent on the inside dog leg of the southern break wall. Wants Beach has been good for bream and whiting at first light and this little known beach continues to provide the spoils for the local brigade.

The breakwall adjacent to the foreshore drive boat ramp has been the hotspot in the bay. Where else can you get live squid next to your launching platform? Also, the anglers in the know have been bagging big whiting, school mulloway and bream at night on locally pumped nippers.

Good news on the outside front, with mahimahi to 70cm finally arriving at the FADs. All you need is a half pilchard on a 3/0 hook followed by size 2 ball sinker cast at the structure. The fish will do the rest. Get there early before the crowds arrive, as too much activity will force them down deep.

Both the inner and outer FADs have been productive and have been the medium of by-catches on the way to Browns Mountain.

Talking about Browns, there are heaps of blue-eye trevalla in the 4-5kg class being taken on pilchards, mullet and squid cocktail baits. We know of one boat taking 18 fish, along with gemmies and silver dory.

The dumping grounds have been fishing well for bar cod and big Chinaman jackets to 3kg. This possie is 14km straight out of Botany Heads and is very consistent, offering alternatives to the very popular Peak or the 12 Miles.

Hargreaves Reef has mowies, reddies, jackets and big tiger flathead, and is another possie which does not get fished much these days. This flat reef is a hit-and-miss proposition, and can be dynamite on its day.

Good-size blue-spot flathead are being taken off Mistral Point and the 46m mark at Cape Bailey, with fish to 55cm being common catches. Discovery Reef, straight out from Port Hacking, has kingfish on the chew taking squid.
On the freshwater scene, bass have been cooperative on the Nepean, with fish to 45cm recorded. Menangle Weir, Douglas Park, Elderslie Footbridge and Theresa Park have been providing the spoils on both soft and hard shell cicada lures. Big carp to 10kg are available for the carp enthusiast at Wallacia Road Bridge, Camden Town Park Lagoon, and Cobbity Weir on corn and bread and cheese baits.

All in all the fishing looks pretty good – if you’re looking for live baits, we have live bloodworms, live nippers and live catch all worms at Gables Boating and Fishing Centre Narellan.

Images

Dylan Robinson is an accomplished angler for his age. He caught this flatty just off Towra.

Mark Thompson did well at Boat Harbour last month.
The Sydney FADs are starting to produce good quality mixed catches.
Towra is really fishing well. Ross got a nice mixed bag there, with one whiting going 47cm.

A recent catch by the author from the Georges River.