

Explosion of fish activity in northern NSW



Nick caught this thumping 55cm Chaffey yella casting lipless crankbaits just on dusk.

ANGLERS across the region surrounding Tamworth, northern NSW and those fishing our many rivers and impoundments over the next few months can expect an explosion of fishing activity.

A spate of wet weather conditions not witnessed for over a decade in our catchments has resulted in a major facelift of our waterways.

After several solid months of increasingly consistent rainfall, Mother Nature has surely turned what was a drought-stricken state into a lush wetland and replenished our impoundments.

It appears that the future



Northern NSW Rivers & Dams

by MATT & NICK WELLS



of fishing in our northwest community seems to be steaming ahead with Tamworth welcoming a new BCF store.

This could not have arrived at a better time.

Lake Keepit

You will find Lake Keepit about 54km west of Tamworth or 38km east of Gunnedah about 7km off the Oxley Highway.

Anglers looking to target Murray cod at Lake Keepit must bear in mind the massive amount of fresh water that has pushed the dam's levels near 100 percent capacity.

In previous years when the dam's levels have progressed rapidly, the Murray cod activity has dampened until the water has settled.

On the other hand, golden perch have taken the advantage to feed on the fresh nutrients and crustaceans throughout the newly drowned grass and structure.

After water levels come to a steady medium and clarity returns to normal, the Murray cod will find their bearings and continue their bone-jarring feeding habits.

Casting spinnerbaits to rocky points and submerged timber as well as trolling deep diving lures will be our No.1 choice for targeting Murray cod at Keepit this season.

Casting lipless crankbaits and soft plastics for golden perch around the trees, drowned grassy points and rocky outcrops will also bring positive results for those willing to persevere to find the fish.

Split Rock Dam

Just to the north of the township of Manilla, Split Rock Dam situated on the Manilla River has progressed to double figures, a level not witnessed for five years or more.

Split Rock is an excellent fishery and exceptional for Murray cod but in recent times the low water levels seemed to slow the cod movement for some time and killed a disturbing quantity of metre-plus brood fish.

The major contributor to Split Rock's lowest levels which saw it dwindle to 2 percent was the massive water release in late 2002 where about 320,000 megalitres were lost in a matter of weeks.

All this for the sake of feeding the cancer of our country we like to refer to as cotton.

We had great success during last winter when the dam fired up, producing some nice cod for us up to and over the magical metre mark while the dam was still at an ice-breaking 2 percent.

The recent rainfall in the

area has seen Split Rock near 20 percent capacity.

When targeting Split Rock over the warmer months up until March, trolling deep diving lures in and around 25-30ft will find you fish around this comfort zone.

Targeting the river section at the rear of the dam will open up some great fishing opportunities for casting and trolling along the rocky drop-offs.

Due to the past few years of record low levels and the lack of water depth we have preferred to leave Split Rock until the cooler months due to water temperatures and conditions.

Warmer water and atmospheric temperatures can have massive strains on larger cod and if landed and handled incorrectly will quite often result in the fish not being able to swim away for another day.

New season lures

The new red-hot lures to look out for this season are the Wilson Slick Back range.

In the short period we have been using these lures we have landed some very nice fish and they are shaping up to be a lure that is going to achieve more hits than the Rolling Stones.

Their name, aptly describing their slick flat top engineering, sets a new benchmark in our ever growing world of lures.

They come in a range of fantastic colours and three sizes 50mm, 80mm and 90mm.

Anglers need to be wary of the vast number of inferior lures that are popping up these days in the fishing world that are so close to other lure manufacturer's designs that they wouldn't even raise an argument in a comparison contest.

It almost appears that walking into a tackle shop, choosing a lure and sending it off to an overseas manufacturer to get copied has become the latest growing trend.

These lures are generally built with dodgy hardware, and a hard battle with a large native will often bring anglers unstuck with straightened hooks, and the only thing returning to the net will be a broken in half bib.

Wilson Slick Backs are 100 percent Aussie designed for our hard-fighting native fish and their style of action and strong hardware surely shows us why they are, and will continue to be, a massive hit in the water.

Chaffey Dam

Chaffey is hovering around 100 percent capacity and has been producing some absolute thumping golden perch from

both casting and trolling diving lures and lipless crankbaits in and around the scattered weed.

Goldens up to 58cm have been taken recently but due to an above average continual influx of cool high country water into the dam, water temperatures have not been able to reach their peak of around 28-30C.

This temperature when reached can spark an electrifying bite usually when water conditions are returning to normal after a good fresh.

This is when anglers can expect catches of up to 30 or more yellies in a single session.

Casting the rivers

When water levels finally decide to recede and the weather gives us a much needed break, heading to the rivers will be a very successful move.

The section of the Namoi River around Manilla stretching from the headwaters of the Warrabah NP down to Lake Keepit and the Peel River from Chaffey Dam through to Tamworth is where all the action will be and there are plenty of stock routes and reserves, so throw in your tinnie or kayak and explore the river.

Asking some locals for a bit of knowledge will put you onto some good fishing spots. Providing the river flow rate is not too swift, spinnerbaiting would be the preferred option.

Anglers should be aware that fishing in swifter waters will have a tendency to affect the action of some spinnerbait retrieves, especially where a larger than normal blade size is used.

Head weights of 5/8oz and 1/2oz are our preferred weight range.

For spinnerbaiting look no further than the Bassman Spinnerbait range.

When casting the rivers throw Bassman Codman, D.T. Codman and Mumbler for excellent results.

We have recently designed and tested two new colours for the Bassman Codman range called Priscilla Pink and Jungle Juice with great results.

Due to the rivers having been continuously flushed out, the water colour will

be slightly dirty and this is the time to throw spinnerbaits with gold blades.

When the water returns to normal clarity and the bottom is almost visible, throw spinnerbaits with double silver blades.

To some anglers this may seem too technical but the success rate of these two different colours when worked with the varying water clarity is surely noticeable.

The Bassman range all come pre-rigged with a soft plastic and a stinger hook and are available in all good tackle shops in our area.

Anglers should also take into account the amount of insect and surface activity that the warmer weather will attract.

This is a time when surface fishing will come into its own.

Surface fishing will generally entice a strike all season long but as the mercury rises, target the shallows for fantastic, heart-stopping results.

If possible, target shallow underwater structure bordering a deeper hole.

Fish will frequent these areas at the beginning or end of the day's hunting mission.

Mudeye Lures Depth Charge is an exceptional surface lure handcrafted by Jamie Flett in Inverell, NSW and designed for the Murray cod waterways of our region.

I have lost count of quality fish we have captured or raised in the rivers on these lures.

Don't forget to drop into your local store and get yourself a Koolabung Cod Walker.

Just like the Depth Charge it has been designed with our northern NSW cod waters specifically in mind.

Also don't be afraid to pack a couple of surface lures when targeting the impoundments for the shallow bays around rocky outcrops and trees.

For any further information and updates, you can contact us via our website at www.wellsbros.net



Matt with a solid Namoi River cod taken on a Bassman Codman.



Nick with a 6kg winter cod taken on a Bassman Codman late last season. We can expect to see plenty more similar catches this season.



Fishing at Chaffey does not come much better than this 57cm whopper caught by Matt.



Matt landed a fair sized Chaffey silver perch while trolling the new Wilson Slick Back 50mm lure.