



Mulloway

Argyrosomus hololepidotus

In WA we have been known to call them "Kingies" and the folks in the east call them Jewfish but, whichever way you look at it, there are few anglers that don't dream of catching a big mulloway at some point in their fishing career.



Mulloway are often an extremely good by-product of some tailor fishing. They are found all over the coast and in most rivers and estuaries and, to the diehards, they are almost a religion.

In recent times, this dedicated band of locals have brought mulloway beyond a by-catch into a real artform slash science with huge fish taken almost every week from The Narrows, North Mole, Mosmans or a host of other "hotspots".

Previously misunderstood, we are now learning a lot more about this fish and it's becoming more and more likely that you too can learn to chase and regularly catch the mighty mulloway.

Scientific Information

The mulloway is widespread throughout all but the northern areas of Australia with western South Australia and Carnarvon, in WA's Gascoyne region, the most widely accepted hotspots. The Australian record is just over 40kg but some fish from South Africa and Madagascar are enormous.

Rarely targeted in deep offshore waters, mulloway normally hunt close to the coast and spend a great deal of their lives in river and estuary systems. Having said that, large fish have been caught in waters up to 150m and many Perth anglers keep their mulloway wrecks behind Rottnest Island very closely guarded. In fact, charter boats



working out of Perth or Jurien will often target mulloway grounds in 60-80m when the dhufish aren't biting. Juvenile fish congregate in small schools but become loners as they get older. Young fish can grow 30cm per year and mature at 6 years of age when they reach about 75cm in size.

How to Catch Them

As a fish that inhabits such a wide area, the local methods for targeting mulloway are going to vary widely. We'll try to break them down as simply as we can.

Perth and Southern Beaches

When tailor are on the bite, mulloway usually clean up scraps left over. Use a sinker rig and cast into foamy gutters. High tide in the late afternoon usually fishes well - especially after summer rains when they will gather at river mouths to feed on the exodus from the river of smaller fish. Bigger fish are usually taken at night.

When the cooler months arrive, so do the rains and this tends to flush the

mulloway back down the system to saltier water and back to the ocean.

As the mulloway continue on their seaward journey, they pour out of our harbours, along our moles and beaches. Lately, North Mole has become the fashionable place to target sea bound mulloway as the word slowly gets out that regulars have been getting them for years.

But, heading onto the beaches, look for deep gutters and try to fish those edges rather than the middle. They seem to like to sit in ambush and use that disturbed water as cover.

Fresh fillets of tailor would have to be the pick of the baits, although plenty of mulloway have been caught on mulies fishing for tailor and salmon. A popular technique is to cast a tailor fillet out onto the edge of the gutter and place the outfit in a rod holder with a light drag setting whilst fishing a smaller outfit in hand for tailor.

Spots like Alkimos, Brighton Road, Trigg, Swanbourne, White Hills, Tim's Thicket and Singleton all provide excellent opportunities to pick up

ABOVE: Long nights and hard work paid off for Luke Ryan when he landed this superb Mosmans mulloway in 2007

OPPOSITE INSET: A northern mulloway or black jewfish caught right on the tide change by Jason Bull
OPPOSITE: South Coast beaches from Esperance along the Great Australian Bight are home to perhaps the biggest mulloway in Australia

large fish as they have just the sort of structure a mulloway is looking for. Often, however, you are better to fish the jetties around Cockburn and Rockingham so keep your eye on fishing reports.

One certain time to target them is just before or particularly after a big storm. They will often pour out of the Swan with the dirty water and stacks are caught along the harbour side of North Mole. As far as moons go, most beach anglers would prefer to fish a new moon but a full moon can also work.

If you have a boat, Cockburn Sound can be an extremely productive spot to spend some warm summer nights ... or cold winter ones if you're a bit mad. Rather than look for structure, most of the Cockburn mulloway chasers tend



to anchor in the muddy areas 10-18 metres deep and the fish certainly are there. The average is about 10kg but some over 20kg are regularly caught.

Swan River

More large mulloway than you expect are pulled out of the Swan each year. During late winter and early spring, mulloway move into our coastal estuaries and begin to school up together to spread throughout our systems. This is a great time to target them in deep water pockets from small boats.

Experts targeting these fish tend to keep excellent records and have certainly found that tides and moon phases play a big part. Big high tides around new and full moons are certainly proving to be excellent times to plan a trip, especially in a small boat.

Steve Palumbo: "Traditionally, you hear people talking about the classic 'all-nighter' but you will find after a few of these you may run yourself into the ground. Fishing the correct tides are paramount and, by spending more time fishing around the full and new moon periods, you are in with a much higher chance.

"The reason for this is during this time period the tides are much higher but, more importantly, the short window period of slack water is where we have had most success. The same applies to targeting mullas on fly at the Narrows. We would go out and fish the last stages of the high but as soon as the water slows up and begins to slacken, the mulloway seem to switch on like clockwork. I normally aim to fish a high that is somewhere around the 8.30 to 10.30pm mark which I believe is the most productive time, 1-2 hours after dark."

There is much debate as to whether dead baits or live baits are more productive. We prefer to use dead baits



ABOVE: Spring is mulloway time in the Swan River and Steve Palumbo nailed this fish after only 3 days of trying (that's a short wait for a mulloway!)

where possible with scaly mackerel being the favourite by far. They stay on the hook extremely well and, being an oily baitfish, they give off a strong fishy smell which croakers can't resist.

Being a soft bait, the mulloway (which tend to be very picky) can easily squash up the bait in their mouth and this increases the chance of a hookup. If there are pickers in the area, crabs being the number one culprit, then a live bait is the way to go.

Over the years we have found that the E Shed in Fremantle Harbour is one of the more productive locations to get live scalies, yellowtail and slimy mackerel. Keep in mind that you

cannot anchor or tie up in the harbour. Security is pretty tight and it won't take long for a security vehicle or patrol boat to kick you out of the area. Obviously, this is also a good place to spend time fishing from shore for mulloway.

The use of berley is another important factor. Any damaged baits get squashed up in the water and always take out extra bait which can be cut up and put into a trap door berley bomb. This is dropped down to the bottom and released so you know the berley remains in the area. During a strong tide, surface berley will get pushed well away from where you are fishing, giving other anglers the upper hand!

Mid-summer, the Narrows Bridge and Causeway in the centre of Perth are the most popular spots and, from here and other land based spots around the city, many are now trying lures.

Rather than camping in one spot like you would when bait fishing, the method here is to move about and not fish the bottom but the mid-water. Mulloway generally feed in the middle third or even the top of the water column so that's where your lure should be. Having said that, people still pick them off on the bottom when prospecting but nailing those fish busting up in the Narrows lights requires a mid-water lure.

From a boat you have the big advantage of being able to drift or, preferably, use an electric bow mounted motor to cover more ground quietly. This works particularly well around bridge pylons like the Narrows where you want to cover plenty of water with as little noise as possible. Outboard noise can and does have a spooking effect on fish that might be feeding near a pylon so try to keep it to a minimum.

From the shore you should be trying to fish mostly around structures like bridges and jetties where mulloway will be holding station looking for a feed. Saturate the area with plenty of casts and move on if nothing is hooked. Many fish have also been hooked from barren areas along the shore of the river near Riverside Drive so be prepared to try other areas if the popular ones are not producing.

Any number of lures can work, from soft plastics to bibbed minnows and the key is certainly to start with a lure you think will work, but be prepared to change and experiment as you go.

Northern Mulloway

As you head north, the chances of catching mulloway do increase but you

have to pick your times. Geraldton can produce some excellent mulloway fishing from 7 Mile and 9 Mile Beaches or Sunset Beach, right near the river mouth and reef break.

Kalbarri is also famous for mulloway at times and the locals say they start moving when dirty water is due to arrive from the Murchison. Good spots include the town jetty, Chinamans and Wittecarra Creek but better catches can be had on the 4WD beaches south of town.

The One Mile Jetty in Carnarvon has produced probably more mulloway than any other land based spot in WA. It's a Mecca for land based mulloway chasers who gather during massive mulloway runs where dozens of fish school under the pylons.

This is not, however, a place for catch and release fishing or for the unprepared because the jetty is a long way from the water and either a flying gaff or very long handled gaff is required to land a fish of any size. Boat fishing can be awesome by anchoring away from the jetty so as not to annoy the other anglers, just floating mulies or even live tailor.

As you head up through Denham, mulloway are found in the bay opposite the township but rarely taken during the day. Night fishing is the go here and locals can often have their tight lips pried apart with a few free ales in the pub at night if you're after some insight into the best places to try.

Port Hedland is a particularly good place to try your luck for black jewfish, the northern version of the mulloway. They are very closely related and can be hard to tell apart at times but the black jews seem to fight extra hard. In fact, they could very well be, pound for pound, the hardest fighting fish in the ocean.

The best time to generally hook or catch black jews is a window of about

30 minutes either side of the tide and the best tides are the lows when there is a lot of movement. You will usually find that action really picks up on the turn of the tide and as soon as your line starts to move on the run in. Sometimes the window is 15 minutes or less when we'll have several hookups, then you can sit there all night without another touch.

Broome is another big black jewfish hotspot. Out in Roebuck Bay are a lot of small reefs and at times they can be crawling with jews, ready to get it on with any tourist that dares fish light. Some can literally be unstoppable on any tackle.

Finally, we want to confirm the question, "Do mulloway really croak?"

Steve Palumbo: "The answer is yes and I have some factual events that can back this up. After taking good mate Cluckers out for a fish we had the strangest experience. Relaxing just after sunset on anchor, we heard the continual sound of croaking coming through the hull.

"Being a fibreglass boat you would not expect the harmonics to travel through like they would in an aluminium boat but it was definitely a mulloway. Continually for at least an hour the annoying, yet eerie sound of the croak echoed through the hull of the boat. When Cluckers drag clicked ever so slightly then suddenly came to life, the attention was quickly put towards landing his first ever Swan River mulloway.

"After a tough tussle around pylons we finally got the massive fish on board and my God, it was croaking its head off. "Jeepers Cluckers," I laughed, "Can you tell your fish to shut up!"

Jewfish, kingies, croakers or mulloway, whatever you want to call them you now have the info you need to head out and find one for yourself.

