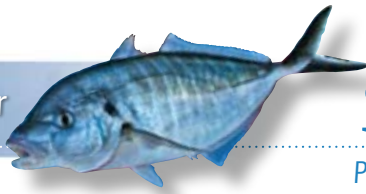


Silver Slugger



Skippy

Pseudocaranx dentex

Once perhaps the most sought after fish by land based anglers in Fremantle, the silver trevally (called skippy in southern WA) doesn't enjoy that sort of popularity any more. I wonder why?

As a fighter, the skippy has few equals for its size and that's due to its bloodline that goes right up to the mighty giant trevally — a fish notorious for busting tackle and breaking the spirit of anglers.



THIS PICTURE: Skippy schooling in numbers halfway along the Busselton Jetty
LEFT: Drifting jigheads designed for soft plastics down your berley trail, you can catch skippy on either bait that's rigged up to be presented very naturally or soft tails like this Berkley Gulp Craw (OPPOSITE, RIGHT)



While not being quite so tough at the sizes they're caught across most of Perth and most of southern WA, skippy still are probably pound for pound the toughest adversary you're likely to catch from shore regularly. But, with the popularity of fishing without sinkers increasing, it means you're not getting into the target zone for skippy while you're chasing herring or garfish.

By targeting them alone, you will find that there are plenty along most local platforms and they don't come much more fun to catch than the *Pseudocaranx dentex*.

Scientific Information

As the most common of the trevally family in Perth waters, skippy are mainly a southern species but the Australian record was taken off Lord Howe Island.

Most fish taken in the local river systems and close to shore are actually juveniles and the adult fish prefer the very deep waters of the continental shelf. This means they're

usually only accessible to boat anglers who rarely target them but often come across the odd one fishing the Derwent wreck or jigging for samsonfish in autumn or winter.

Adults have been known to school on the surface in these areas and spawn in summer. Females produce several batches of eggs over a few weeks which are carried by currents.

Skippy hunt worms, molluscs

and crustaceans in the sand and rocks but rarely fish. Having said that, fish baits are perhaps the best.

How to Catch Them

Inshore

Skippy tend to hang around structure but they are also quick to respond to other fish getting a free meal. That's why berley is very important when chasing them. Parmelia Bank right through to North Mole is a good

place to start but any weedy area with good sand patches is worth a look.

Reefs and broken ground from Cottesloe through Hillarys and Mindarie right up to Yanchep offer small boat owners many opportunities to target them in shallow water.

Late autumn and winter is the best time and by berleying up over sand with pellets right under your boat you can get them very fired up. Allow time for the skippy to come into your area. They'll be easy to spot in shallow

water as the thin, silver shapes near the bottom. Herring are also likely to be part of the feeding frenzy so choosing the right rig and bait is important to ensure you mainly get the skips.

The best two baits are fresh squid tentacles and bluebait in that order. Catching a squid near the weed in winter should be an easy task and by quickly converting it to bait you can pick through the herring until the skippy turn up. Most fresh squid baits should account for several



LEFT: Skippy don't come much bigger than this monster!

fish before you need to rebait.

Bluebait should be used on an appropriate sized gang and fished on the bottom using a sinker but one of the problems with fishing reefy inshore grounds can be getting through the wrasse and large collection of unwanted species. It's no fun for you, and it's certainly no fun for them! This is where berley comes into its own if you use it properly.

By suspending your berley container close to the surface, the berley trickles down and brings any skippy up to the surface to investigate. Now you have a clear separation between the bottom feeders and the fish you're really looking for.

The next task is to prepare gear for the task and, once again, the soft plastic revolution can be thanked for providing an excellent option. In the past, either a Paternoster or running sinker rig would

Skippy



RIGHT: Inshore skipper don't come much bigger than this fine specimen caught by Steve Palumbo
BELOW: A 6 kilo example of the monster skipper that school in deep water off Perth, usually 100 metres plus



be the go here but lately we've been opting for simply a jighead tied onto a fluorocarbon leader. You don't just have to fit them with soft plastics, they make excellent bait fishing rigs too.

Whitebait, bluebait, mulie fillets and prawns can be used and you simply thread the bait onto the jig so that it resembles a small baitfish. Not you have a combination bait / lure that's

pretty hard to resist. The final piece of the puzzle is how it flutters down in the current like a suicidal baitfish feeding in the berley trail. Nothing can resist it and skipper more so.

Skippy are a hard charger and you don't get a full appreciation of their toughness until you fish light. Just like fly fishers love the direct connection, having nothing but a jighead connected

to the fish means you're able to play them right out, enjoying the small but powerful runs and the never-say-die attitude of Perth's trevally.

Another idea to try once you get the fish fired up is Berkley Gulp soft plastics on the jig. By cutting the tail down to size on the 3" Craws, the skipper can get their whole mouth around the soft Gulp and they greedily swallow it.

By letting the more durable soft tail drift down past the smaller fish you allow the larger skipper to get a crack at the hook. Bigger fish, less baiting up and no guts on the deck from the baits meant Gulps certainly prove themselves worth having in the tackle box.

Other hotspots for small boat skipper include the Rockingham Causeway arch to Garden Island, the D9 off Kwinana, sand patches near Carnac Island and Mewstone, Coventry Reef and Rottnest Island is particularly productive over winter.

Perth Beaches

It's not common to catch skipper from the beach but coastal jetties offer the protection these fish look for. Fish of any great size are only found at a few times of the year, however.

Most jetties suitable for skipper are

in the Rockingham area. Cockburn Sound seems to hold a lot more skippy than northern beaches and you want to concentrate on Palm Beach or Kwinana. Once again, berley is quite important but rather than using pellets, a good dough mix in a berley cage sinker is perfect.

Cast it as far as you can and wind it in slowly, taking notes on where the bites are coming from. If the berley is working correctly, you should be able to lure the skippy in closer and closer while by-catches of herring should keep you entertained.

Rocks & Groynes

This is the perfect place for the shore based angler to get into some very sizable skippy. Northern marinas, once again, don't seem to have the same numbers as you'll get from Fremantle and further south.

North Mole is a very good location to start, especially on a windy, winters day. Berley sinkers are the go again as you search for good holes where the skippy gather to feed off the rocks. Normally they are a fair distance from the rocks so an outfit capable of a good cast is important. Another important factor is bait. Soft baits will be nailed by blowfish so large, durable baits and large hooks are best. Berkley Craws are also worth trying here too.

Blowies will tax 'em but you'll also get a crack at the skippy with them.

If the fish aren't on the ocean side, try fishing in the river mouth from either North or South Mole. Rough weather tends to wash food off the rocks and skippy like to pick around in there.

ASI Groyne is another worth trying in bad weather. It doesn't seem to have the same numbers of fish but it still can fire. As can the rocks just before the Causeway arch in Rockingham ... if you're able to get out there.

Perth's Monster Offshore Skippy

The Australian record silver trevally was taken off Lord Howe Island but Perth can produce some whoppers of its own. Reports from samsonfish jiggers of winter skippy reaching 7, 8 ... even 9 kilos are not fiction. They do happen.

While samsonfish rule the wrecks and sea containers littered in the 80 – 200 metre deep waters off the back off Rottnest from November through most of summer, late winter (and September / October in particular) offers a rare chance for Perth anglers to tangle with big silver trevally.

Like sambos, skippy schools on deep wrecks show up as a yellow blob but often they're a little way off the structure. Jigging for them is pretty much the same as for sambos and, if anything, they probably go

harder over a shorter period of time. If only they came close to shore eh?

South West

The further south you go, the better the skippy fishing will get. Notable locations for SW action are the Busselton Jetty, Albany Jetty and the beaches around Esperance, Augusta and Yalingup also have big populations of generally smallish fish from shore, with occasional 2 kilo plus skippy coming from the 4 Mile Reef off Dunsborough.

Walpole locals have named Skippy Rock in the Nornalup Inlet after the big numbers that you find there but Cape Arid east of Esperance is perhaps the best beach fishing for skippy there is.

The crystal clear waters of this amazing stretch of beach are home to loads of salmon schools but in closer are skippy that can push a couple of kilos at times. The beaches are dotted with round boulders that make ideal platforms to cast and berley from. Ideally, you want to find holes and gutters to fish where large schools gather to rest or feed.

It's not inconceivable that once people get into skippy on lures in a big way we could see another type of soft plastic lure explosion. It would be great to see and they sure fight harder than any bream!

