



Deepwater fishing for hapuku, bass and bluenose - Pete Lamb

Two revolutionary enhancements in tackle and gear help immensely while deepwater fishing.

The low or non-stretch braided and fusion lines, and the GPS (Global Positioning System), particularly the charterplotter.

Braided line has virtually no stretch allowing you to feel the fish bite, even a small scarpie can be felt in 300mtrs of water but a good bass, bluenose or puka will double the rod over and start thumping, even stripping line off the spool.

Photo right – 30kg puka, 33kg angler on 52ft Melicent

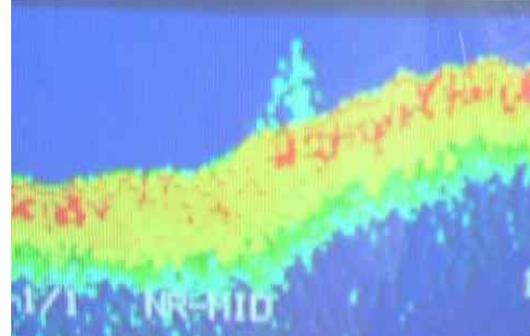
The GPS allows you to pre-program the good fishing spots and get back to them without having to line up landmarks. When you get on your 'mark' you stop the boat and see which way you are drifting, reposition the boat, let your lines out then once you have

For deepwater fishing the first thing you should do is obtain depth and bathometric charts for the area you plan to fish. From these you can see where the fish are likely to live and plot some good looking fishing locations.

You may consider obtaining a suitable depth sounder to get down to and give accurate readings to approximately 350 metres in depth. Colour sounders certainly give a much better picture than the single colour CD models. 1 kilowatt of grunt from the transducer is considered good for a sounder in the deep water. The photo below right is off the depth sounder in 150mtrs with a 'haystack' of 100 or so puka.

The GPS is a great tool for getting onto the spot and programming in new places, but you can get away without one at a pinch. If you are buying one make sure it has tracking (leaves a trail where you have been). A CHART PLOTTER is amazing for finding the fishing spots. These day you can get one for around \$600.

(right) – the daiwa 900H reel is a great deepwater reel
(right above) – lumo sleeves and tube are good on traces to attract deepwater fish



NICHOLSONS TRENCH - is a canyon about 3 miles out from Sinclair Head running down to Turakerei Head and into Palliser Bay. It is approximately 1.5 miles wide. The good fish (groper, bass and bluenose) are usually abundant in 150 to 250 metres of water.

There are a few different recognised fish patches in the trench. These are very localised and to get into numbers of fish you just about have to hit the nail on the head. The patches are about the size of half a rugby field.

Different areas fish well when the current forces the food and plankton up against the side of the canyon. If the current pushes all the food away from the spot, results aren't as good. Therefore you need to be drifting up into shallower water.

FISHERMANS ROCK: Located 8 miles off the back of mana this is one of the better puka spots on the west coast of wgt. There are plenty of spots there in 160 – 240mtrs to catch good number and large puka. The run from march – july is very good and some real monsters over 100lb come out most years prior to their annual spawn. THE WEST COAST: Spots are usually shallower for groper - 75 to 150 metres with the common ones marked on the depth chart and as follow: Fishermans Rock, Hunter Bank, Mana bank (off the back of Mana Island). There are some good spots out from Boom Rock, Makara and Ohau point as well.

THE EAST COAST: The groper can be abundant in quite shallow water during the summer months. They will often be mixed in with trumpeter, tarakihi and blue cod. This area has the deepest water close to shore, oceanic currents with gamefishing potential and exists the best place for fishing but arguably has the worst weather. TERRAIN WHERE FISH ARE FOUND

Look for rock or reef structures where food (small fish and plankton) is abundant.

With the bathometric and depth charts take note of any interesting shallow patches, hills and the like that might catch a bit of back current and hold food for your target fish. The fish generally like the top of a gentle rise, seamounts and edges of canyons.

You can take the coordinates off the chart, or use your chartplotter for accurate spots. Always keep a lookout on your sounder while travelling around the place for fish sign and interesting rock structures.

SPECIES of FISH

BASS - A superb eating fish classified under the same commercial fish quota as groper. They generally grow larger than groper and are often found in deeper water. We never seem to catch them in depths of water under 200 metres with 250 to 325 mtrs a good depth.

Every year there is usually a fish caught over 50kgs in Wellington. A good one is generally 20kg plus. Further north they are caught up to 100kgs. Bass can be distinguished from groper by their deeper stomach, shorter lower jaw and a larger eye. The best months seem to change from year to year but late summer through the winter and early summer can certainly be good. They are slow growing fish taking 5-10 years to reach maturity and a large adult being 50yrs plus (50kg)

In Wellington a few bass get caught at fishermans rock and behind the 78mtr rise but most get caught at Nicolson's Trench or in the Wairarapa (East coast). Places in the outer bay of plenty, the ranfurly bank, the 3 kings and the far north all produce bug fish at various times of the year. The further you get away from civilization the better the fishing (which is true with many species)

GROPER (hapuku) - A solid fish but more slender than the bass. They are happy to live in shallower water but are often swim with bass. At certain times of the year the big ones will be as shallow as 75 metres but generally live from 125 metres down to 250 metres. An average fish is

around 10 to 15kgs, a biggie is 30kg plus but again the odd 50kg plus fish gets taken in Cook Strait. In Wgtn they normally arrive in October and disappear around June/July preferring deeper colder water to spawn possibly off Kaikoura. Further north they are known to spawn in late summer and the main season can be a bit shorter. This changes in locations all around the country. Some fish are residents, other travel great distances and are believed to come back to the same spots year after year. The species is known to be in decline and is easily overfished. We have noticed spots fished out coming back on with smaller fish 5 – 10years later. They grow approx 1kg per year in the wild and have grown up to 1kg a month in captivity. Some of the wild fish could grow twice to 5 times as quick depending on food source. They are aggressive feeders eating small fish, squid, redcod and BRC, sea perch, rat tails, lanternfish, tarakihi (from what we have noticed). A mature fish is normally around 8-12kg. Bass, bluenose and puka don't mind temps down to 9 or 10 degrees.

BLUENOSE - From what I've observed the bluenose is the more aggressive fighting fish of the 'big three'. You can catch them in the same area as bass and groper but sometimes shallower ground of around 110 to 200 metres can produce good numbers of fish. Sometimes big schools of fish congregate in 250 – 350 metres in the Bay of Plenty and Far North. They can feed well up off the bottom as well. Average size at Nicolsons Trench is about 5 to 7kg but a good one can be 10 to 20kgs. The best I have heard of is 33kgs by Steve Brown from the Wgtn area. Fish get caught up to 40kg in the Bay of Plenty. Unlike groper and bass, they are available all year round and seem to be on the move and spread out in an area rather than resident in one particular spot. November to late January can be the best time in Wellington but things are constantly changing as we discover new spots. They grow about 1-2kg per year with a mature fish being 4-6kg. They appear to spawn late summer-ish but this is yet to be proven. They certainly like the edge of a big canyon or trench with a big 200 – 600mtrs plus dropoff. Presumably this is for food supply. They like eating deepwater fish like lanternfish and squid.



A 22kg (48lb) bluenose caught at Nicolsons Trench on charter vessel Daniel – a day when the ladies caught most of the fish! Caught in 180mtrs

LING

If you are catching ling you are probably in too deeper water to catch groper but may hook the odd big bass. The ling is a much maligned fish because they don't fight terribly well, and they don't taste

quite as good as groper. However they are still good eating and deserve more recognition than some of the more experienced anglers give them. Keep them on ice before filleting. They are a great stir-fry fish with soy sauce, fried in butter! The average size varies at different times of the year. Just lately they have been around 8kg. At other times they are closer to 15kg. For a big ling say 20 or 30kg plus, I would be fishing in 300 to 400 metres water depth.

HOKI and GEMFISH

These fish are often up off the bottom and at certain times of the year are in huge numbers at the Trench. They are good eating if you look after the fish (keep them on ice). They are also very good bait.

SHARKS

There is a very healthy shark fishery in the deep water. We have had many encounters with blues and makos. A few with porbeagles and threshers and many with tope, particularly when you are fishing in less than 150 metres. They provide great entertainment for sportfishing enthusiasts and the smaller ones are able to be processed for food without too much danger of losing limbs! One thing to be wary about is puncturing the ammonia sack inside the gut cavity. It can give you a nasty dose of 'shark fever' which from personal experience, I cannot recommend.

OTHER SPECIES

Some of the more interesting species we have caught at the Trench are frostfish, rat-tail, orange perch, seal shark and ghost shark. XOS tarakihi and blue cod (2 to 3kg) are often on the top of a reef say in are around 100 to 150 metre depth. It is worthwhile sending down some smaller hooks to experiment with other species from time to time. Rays bream – see end of article

TUNA

Plenty of albacore have been caught off Turakerei and in the trench but only during the peak of summer. If more people targeted tuna with lures and cut baits on strayline then we would see more action. With Long (knife) jigs now being used there is a chance of wom tuna being landed where we thought there were none.



An 8kg slender tuna caught jigging caught while puka fishing - 11 degrees temp, 30mtrs under the boat)



(left – loligo baby squid. Some people prefer nz arrow squid as it is firmer)
(right – iqf nz pilchards, arguably the best bait for deepwater fishing)

BAITS – fresh is best, good quality squid and pilchards catch everything.

BASS: strips of hoki or mackerel. Pilchards always work well too.

GROPER: everything works well - squid, pilchards, strips of barracouta, kahawai or mackerel. Whole or fillets of sea perch is a goodie. Groper often have whole perch, rat-tails, mackerel and squid inside their stomachs.

BLUENOSE: squid is certainly tops, pilchards too.

GENERAL BAITING UP TIPS: Cut baits into torpedo shapes and hook once through one end . This stops them from twisting and spinning their way to the bottom. For the extra chance of a hookup add a pilchard or two by hooking them through the eye socket hook. Sometimes small baits work well, other times big baits catch big fish

FLUORESCENT TUBE, BEADS AND STICKS

Putting fluoro tube and beads on your rigs seems to increase your catch rate but it is certainly not imperative to catch fish. It is widely believed that using cylume sticks attached to the top of your swivel or sinker work well for deepwater species. For puka the blue sticks have been working well. Some fishers reckon the green sticks left going for 8 hours or so work better than the bright ones. Fresh squid, octopus and hoki are three baits which have natural fluoro. It would be interesting experimenting with the bait additive glow-bai to see how it works in the deep water.

LONGJIGS: The new knifejigs have been a proven performer, especially in depths up to 150mtrs. The orange/brown colour has been good on bass and puka. 300, 400, 500gm all good depending on the tide running

SOFTBAITS: using the new scented softbaits have been a good extra additive to bait. The lumo ones work well and the chatruce 7" gulp has been our most successful softbait on puka. We always use the softbait in conjunction with normal bait.

FISHING TECHNIQUES

Boat handling: In deep water (200 mtr plus) dont bother anchoring. If possible, get the skipper to back into the wind slowly. This will keep you on the spot for longer and keep your lines from streaming out the back of the boat. Doing this also reduces the weight sinker you need.

PLEASE NOTE: This practise is dangerous in small boats so be careful.

When you hook a fish put a mark on the GPS so you can get back onto the ~fishpatch'. Look for fish sign on the sounder. If the sign is up off the bottom it is likely to be bluenose, hoki or possibly baitfish.

Water colour: Dirty water normally means hard fishing. Consistent catches frequently happen in clean blue water. Bass and ling dont mind the dirty water so much

Avoiding tangles: If you have more than a couple of people fishing, get everyone to drop their lines at the same time.

Make sure everyone has similar weight sinkers on. Just fish one side of the boat and along the stern. Keep the braided lines, dacron and monofilament lines away from each other (nylon one end of the boat, superbraids the other).

If you see your line going towards someone elses cross over or under until it looks right - this is important when you are winding up with or without a fish on.

Hooking up fish: When someone hooks up there should be more fish around. Click your reel into freespool for a while. Often this will result in a hookup. Be in touch with the bottom - keep letting a bit more line out. If you hook a small fish like a sea perch (you will tell when using braid but not if using nylon), rather than wind up, leave it down there. Groper like eating them whole. If you get snagged, back the drag off then click the reel into freespool for a while. Again this will often result in a hookup.

There some awesome deepwater fishing possies all the way along the Wairarapa coastline particularly from Cape Palliser through to Uriti. Some of the commercially fished spots are in depths 300 to 500 metres. With the weather being a good conservation measure on this coast the fish are often bigger.

RIGS - The standard deep water rig is a beefy ledger rig. 30 ounce sinker (occasionally 40oz) on the bottom attached with a snap swivel or slightly lighter nylon than used for your mainline. This is so if you get snagged you only lose your sinker. The trace line is usually 300 to 400lb with droppers coming off crimped swivel sleeves or dropper loops (or snoods). The droppers are normally 150 to 200lb. My preferred hooks are 15/O tuna circles or 12 – 14/O ezibaiters. When the fishing is tough try 10 – 12/o hooks with 130lb trace. This will often result in better fishing.



TACKLE:

Reels - The following are all reels we have used hard on our charter boats and have taken heaps of big fish without any maintenance issues - Daiwa 600H, 900H, Tica 30 single speed and 50wide two speed, Shimano tld30 and 50, penn gld30 single speed.

Rods - When using braid on rods try keeping away from metal guides and rollers (they get grouded and stuff the braid). Rods like shimano tyrnos, penn trifibre, tica proveave and daiwa sealine are all good rods. We like a 5'6 24kg rod with bigfoot ceramic guides and heavy ceramic tip.

Line - Generally 500mtrs of 80lb braid is recomende for deepwater fishing. If you have an accident with the propellar or a shark then you can loose your braid and have enough left on the reel tokeep fishing. Enthusiasts spool up with 750 – 1000mtrs of 80lb. Cortland blackspot is good middle of the road braid

FISHING ETIQUETTE

GPS - Zapping someone elses spot on your GPS is not good fishing etiquette. No one likes it having it done to them when they are on their good spot so think about next time you are out there. Dont take a handheld GPS on another boat without permission. I am happy to give some marks to our clients but dont take kindly to people trying to 'steal' our hard earnt spots.

Try not to start your drift too close to another boat. Wait for the boat to drift a bit then go a few 100 mtres up current from them, then you should not have any chance of tangling you lines with them. If someone is anchored up keep a reasonable distance away from them. If you try and anchor too close and your pick doesnt hold you can foul up their rope and lines.

Shooting drop lines (long lines) on a recognised fish patch will stop everyone else fishing. It is normally first in first served when arriving at a fishing possie. When a spot has long line buoys on it you can bet it is going to be very tricky to pull a fish out without getting caught on the drop line. If that happens, you lose your gear.

SAFETY - watch out for rips after turn of tide, weather changes and be prepared for engine failure with the usual safety equipment - EPIRB, VHF radio (channel 14 or 16), FLARES, LIFEJACKETS (wear them while in transit), CELLPHONE etc.

Having 2 x 220 metre coils of 4mm rope (to get to the bottom and anchor you up) and a sea anchor (to keep the bow into the wind) means you won't drift into never never land while waiting for assistance if your engine fails.

VHF RADIO – a real must for offshore boating. Have your VHF radio left on scan to pick up any wind warnings or weather reports from ships.

In Wellington, Beacon Hill (harbour radio) are on channel 14 and 62. Wellington maritime radio are on channel 16 (the emergency frequency). If you are in trouble which is life threatening, issue a mayday on ch 16, if you are in trouble but not life threatening issue a pan pan on ch16.

Do a trip report with people on board, where leave from, when return and where your going

WEATHER – Up to 10 or 15 knots from the north or south is reasonable particularly if there is no ground swell. 20 -25 knots is fishable but in a staunch trailer boat or launch. 30 knots plus is bigger boat than a launch. Use the coastal forecast (Cook, Stephens, Castlepoint, Plenty) not the recreational marine (Mana, Kapiti or Wgtn) for deepwater fishing. Always allow for another 10 knots on top of forecast. Keep a lookout for wind or fronts coming across the water. They are easy to see.



(left) a rays bream caught jigging in 20 – 40mtrs under the boat while puka fishing – we have caught up to 50 or more of these great eating fish while puka fishing. They take jigs and baits and prefer warmer water (down to 14 degrees).

(right) we have caught 30 + live puka to 40lb and transported them to holding tanks for future puka farms



30kg puka



35kg puka



20kg + bluenose



20kg + bass

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