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## Snapper – July 2011, Pete Lamb



A nice winter 20lber caught inside Wellington Harbour

### FIND THE FISH FIRST

The most important factor in catching snapper is finding the right location. The fish have got to be there for a start. Once you have found a location then use good quality bait, berley and tackle to catch them.

A good spot is generally away from civilization, with minimal commercial and recreational pressure or has a good food source and is a traditional snapper spot.

Snapper will often patrol a sandy/shingle area for shellfish, worms and crustaceans or hang out around a rocky location feeding on shellfish, crabs and small fish.

Fishing the edge of a reef can be good, but often out on the sand is good too. Trying areas for 30 – 60 minutes with berley and then moving on is a good technique. Once you find the fish its all on. They will move around a bit being in 10 – 15mtrs one day and 25 – 35 the next. When the water goes colder they can move into deeper water.

Water temp cant be too cold. 14 degrees is normally the minimum with 16 – 18 degrees the best. Sometime you can throw the tremp gage away when the fish are reallu hungry.

During spawning time the snapper move into an area with the right ground for laying their eggs. Their signal for this a change in water temperature. This happens at different times of the year in different parts of the country. In Wgtn its around march/april

In the upper North Island the snapper are around all year round. The winter time is great for XOS snapper close to deepwater rock ledges like cape brett, kari kari, north cape etc

For surfcasters XOS snapper move in close to beaches south of Wanganui and in Hawkes Bay in late October and early November (pre swawning time)

## **TACKLE**

The lighter your line, smaller your hooks and lighter the sinker, the more fish you will hook up and hopefully land. The problem is that you might bustoff or pull the hook out of a fish using the light gear.

On the sand, shingle or mud you can use light tackle and catch some big fish. In the rough ground you will need to gear up to avoid loosing too many fish. As you gain experience you will be able to land bigger fish on lighter line.

### **Braid or nylon?**

These days many anglers are using braid instead of nylon because it has little or no stretch, is half to a third of the diametre of nylon and its got high anti abraision qualities. When using braid you need a flexible rod tip to act as a shock absorber and also you may need to use a bit heavier line (I use 50lb braid like I do 35lb nylon) than you would if you using nylon.

Knot strength is not usually as good in braid as it is in nylon but if you double up when tying the knot its pretty good. The two kinds of braid are - Casting braid which has a memory and spectra or dyneema which is a bit thicker but has a better anti-abraision quality.

Nylon comes in thin or thich diametre, soft or hard, low or standard stretch, so it pays to spool up with the right kind for the right job. Thin diametre is good for fishing deep water off the boat or for distance casting off the shore, hard thicker diamtre (hard) is better for narly rock locations

Many people start with 10-15kg line and then experiment with lighter or heavier stuff depending on conditions and the size of fish around.

Light tackle is good to catch 'cagey' fish as they don't see the line and it appears more natural.

Breaking strain of about 3 – 6kg is classified as light. Medium tackle (6 – 10kg). Heavy tackle for big fishing rough ground is 10 – 15kg or even heavier. For XOS snapper in rough ground I use 50 – 80lb braid.

### **Hooks**

There are two main styles of hook these days. The self setting hook and the striking hook.

Recurve, circle or mutsu hooks are all self setting and normally hook the fish in the corner of the mouth.

The other style of hook is the beak, octopus or suicide hook. Sometimes these hooks will gut or gill hook a fish, especially with a two hook rig.

For smaller snapper I use a 3 or 4/O recurve hook and for bigger fish a 6 – 8/O recurve.

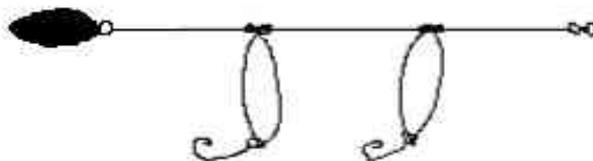
### **Traces and Rigs**

For traces use good quality nylon or flourocarbon. 40 – 60lb is pretty good, 80lb for XOS snapper and 20 - 30lb for school (smaller) fish. The flourocarbon is hard for the fish to detect as its got a similar refractive index as water.

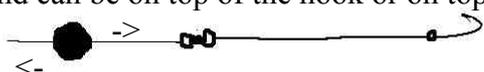
Hooks 3/O to 10/O depending on the size of fish you are after

swivels - #5 - #3 for small to medium fish, 1/o – 2/o for big fish, #6 Ball bearing swivels for XOS snapper

Ledger (dropper) rig – My favourite rig for surfcasting (4-5oz torpedo sinker) and boatfishing (4 – 16oz sinker) in current



running sinker – smaller the better to get the bait down to where the fish are. Stronger current or landbased fishing require a larger sinker to get the bait to the fish area. The sinker runs up and down the line and can be on top of the hook or on top of the swivel.

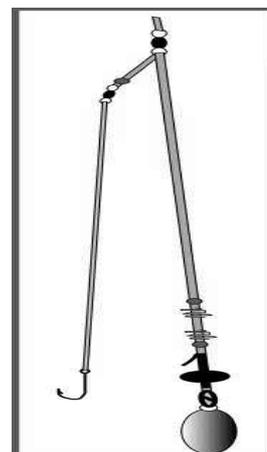


You can have a 2<sup>nd</sup> hook running on top the main hook or have it fixed with a snood knot a inch or 2 up from the main hook

strayline- This is my favourite rig if there is minimal current and small 'picker' fish about. I'll use a 30 - 50lb flourocarbon leader and a hook snelled onto the end. This is simply a hook a the end of you line

pulley rig – the best ultra distance rig for surfcasting. Its a ledger rig which works a bit like a running rig, very cunning and effective.

Attach the hook to the bait clip or impact shield (above the sinker) ----->



## TECHNIQUES

The bigger snapper often hang back and let the smaller fish have a feed first. If you cast back a bit further down the berley trail, away from the rocks, beach or boat, it will sometimes help you hook the big one.

### hooking up

There are two schools of thought.

1 - let the fish bend the rod over and strike or just start winding. The hook should set in the corner of the mouth

2 - let the fish run a bit to take down the hook then set the hook.

I prefer strike straight away and 'lip hook' the fish. If you let it run before striking, it may feel the hook and spit out the bait.

The method of setting the hook particularly a recurve or circle hook is to let the weight come on solid, then start winding. The hook will set itself in the corner of the mouth.

With standard beak hooks you'll need to strike to set the hook then keep the weight on.

### playing or fighting the fish

Keep the weight on all through the fight (keep it tight). Have the drag set to  $\frac{1}{4}$  or  $\frac{1}{3}$ <sup>rd</sup> of the breaking strain of the line. If the fish takes you into the weed or rocks, back the pressure off. The fish may swim out of the foul. If you leave the pressure on with a fish in the rough it will cut the line.

## landing the fish

A large landing net for fish over 3kg is a good ideal. Lead the fish to the net and scoop it up. Take it easy at the beach, rocks or boat, back the drag off a bit and lead the fish rather than force it, as the hook may fall or tear out. If you gaff the fish, go for the head for a kill shot and through the lip for a release job. Place the gaff in the water and let the fish swim over it before one swift jerk on the gaff. A sharp gaff prong is imperative.

## BAIT

Snapper will take just about anything but the most consistent baits seem to be pilchard, skipjack tuna and Squid. Softbaits have proven to be very successful, piper and mullet are good performers especially in the mid to upper North Island while octopus, mackerel and kahawai all work well in particular places and times. Whatever you use it must be the best quality available

My favorite baits for big snapper - The whole or half skipkie head or 4-5 pillies threaded on a hook. Many of the big snapper I've seen and caught have taken pilchards, fresh kahawai has been good as well as mackerel, tuna, spotty and blue cod heads (the later two particularly in the Marlborough Sounds)

Big baits = big fish and stop the smaller fish annoying you as much, however it's nice to catch a feed as well and smaller baits do the business on many fish.

Skipjack tuna is one of the best snapper baits along with pilchards



**Straylining deadbaits** - whole fish or cubes.

I hook a pilchard through the eye socket with a 5 or 6/O hook and throw it out. Sometimes I thread the hook back through the pily about half way down the body. Also tying the bait on with cotton is good for extra durability in casting.

Having a small running sinker say 1/4 to 1oz is good to assist casting and to get the bait away from the seagulls that often hang around.

Occasionally when the fish won't take a bait try a single cube with a smaller hook and possibly a lighter trace.

## **BERLEY** (or ground bait)

Good berley really brings the fish on the feed and keeps them feeding. Minced and chunks of tuna, pilchard, flying fish, kina, crab, crayfish body and paua gut are my favourites. As long as we are using at least one of those I am happy.

It one of the most important things for snapper fishing after finding where the fish are. Use good quality berley and plenty of it. The best stuff I reckon is pilchard followed closely by skipjack tuna, smashed up or minced kina, paua gut and crayfish bodies.

My best method of berleying is making up a bucket brew and ladling out small or large quantities on a regular basis into the water, preferably a gut with backwash. This helps disperse the berley.

While doing this I keep a good watch on what is swimming through the trail.

Putting berley into a tough berley bag, tying it onto a rope and dangling it into the water is another good berley method for rockfishing or boatfishing shallow and/or water without too much current and works in combination with the bucket brew very well. It is important to ration the berley for the day and have a bit spare for when the fish turn up. If nothings happening you can 'berley up a storm'.

Specifically for boatfishing with the tide running I use some kind of dispenser to get the berley to the bottom and i also throw pieces of berley in and let it float down too.

This is our favourite berley dispenser in Wellington (right). We use one with larger holes if there are no blind eels around. I weight the pot with a sash weight or 4 x 30oz sinkers to get the dispenser to the bottom (using 4mm cord).



Placement of the berley pot is vital to catching fish. The tide may not always be running where you expect it too especially if the wind is running a different direction. I normally wait until the lines are down then check the angle, then deploy the pot in the right place to set the trail right through the lines.

I like to use a 4 or 10litre bomb inside an onion sack to get the fish going. This creates a nice cloud of berley, then dispenses a bit every now and then. If the fish go off the feed, throw some more berley in. The chunkier, shelly bits last a bit longer and sink down to where the bigger snapper lurk.

## SOFTBAITS

I've always had the best success using a softbait and a pilchard or tuna bait on the same hook. It's outfished standard softbaits time and time again. I either run a standard dropper or running rig with the softbait and the appropriate sinker for the current running and water depth. Chatruce 3" mullet has been my best snapper catcher although most work when the fish are biting. The snapper come in and nail the pilchard and if you dont hook up then the often come back a 2<sup>nd</sup> time to nail the softbait.



The nuclear chicken softbait has been the most popular nz wide and they glow which helps in deepwater.

**SLOW JIGS** - have proven to be a very successful snapper jig, sometimes when the fish go off the feed with bait they will take slowjigs aggressively. Just bounce them along the bottom with a yo yo style action. They come in different weights and colours for different occasions. Lucanous and crazy charlie are a couple of brands which work well.

## BOAT SPECIFICS

**fishing current** – I fish in 30 – 60mtrs of water depth with 1 – 2 knots of tide running. In these conditions I use a dropper (ledger) rig with 2 – 3 hooks and a 10, 16 or 20oz sinkers depending on the tide. We are normally fishing on the edge of a reef, sometime just out on the sand a bit. I also fish the 15 – 25mtr sandy areas where we anchor up in the area and berley the fish to us. It might be on the edge of a reef or sand bank or hole.

When i have pre-marked spots on the gps, I steam up to the mark, stop the boat, see which way I'm

drifting then steam up current or wind from the spot and drop the anchor. If I don't catch fish within about 45 minutes I will let more rope out or re-anchor the boat.

Sometimes if there are plenty of fish around or if the tide is running to fast then I do drifts through good looking area, if we catch fish then we drift the same area again, if no fish then we try a different drift, maybe a bit shallower or deeper.

Keeping your baits in touch with the bottom is important at all times.

## **LANDBASED SPECIFICS**

Prospecting the rocks – fish a narley looking location which you wouldn't normally fish with lots of rocks and weed. Fish for about 15-20 minutes, then move 100mtrs along the coast, fish for another 15-20 min and then move along again. You will often find a 'pocket' of resident snapper in a particular area.

If you want a monster use heavier line in rockier areas - 50lb nylon or 80lb braid. Tie your sinker on with lighter line so it snaps off if snagged.

Use a boby float (running float) for the really snaggy areas you wouldn't normally consider fishing. Set a uni knot on the leader 3 – 4 metres up from the hook so your bait is positioned just up out of the weed. This techniques can be deadly on cagey 'rock mooching' snapper.

If you're not catching fish, use a smaller hook and lighter line.

Fish your feet first.



A nice chilly bin full of snaps and teris from Wellingtons west coast



a couple of double figure snaps caught ledger rig fishing in 70mtrs

**The slow jig can be deadly on snapper**

