

Australian Lure Fishing Podcast Episode 276



Melbourne Snapper



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Lee Rayner

Fishing Personality, TV Host

Over many years, Lee has left his mark on many styles of fishing for just as many different species. A very versatile angler, Lee is well known for his television productions, from “Tuna Bluefin Tactics”, “Snapper Fishing Tactics” and “Whiting Fishing Tactics” back in 2008 to his long running fishing show “Fishing Edge”, which takes him all over Australia fishing for every imaginable species.



Lee’s Melbourne Snapper Tips

- Despite being a “stones throw” apart, Port Phillip Bay and Westernport Bay are chalk and cheese. Port Phillip is a relatively shallow, flat and featureless basin with a largely mud bottom and minimal structure and little flow, other than at “The Rip” where flow is extreme. Westernport is tidal and shaped like a hand with narrow fingers and adjacent mudflats, plenty of structure and strong tidal flow.
- The snapper entering the two bays are different strains of the species, with Port Phillip snapper largely migrating to the bay from the west, while Westernport snapper largely move in from the east.
- Snapper fishing in these bays usually starts in October/November as the water warms and continues into the summer months.

- Fishing is usually best in the leadup to a full moon with a rising or high barometer, the exception being for land-based snapper, which often fish well during a big blow with a low barometer.
- Snapper can be caught right through the day, although Lee prefers to fish the shallow water in the pre-dawn period and finds that he catches smaller numbers of fish, but larger specimens by doing this.
- It's surprising how often snapper are off the bottom and are feeding mid-water on schools of bait. Anglers often assume the mid-water arches are not snapper and as a result they miss opportunities.
- Lee likes to fish a fairly heavy drag in order to set the hooks as he's found that fish will clamp down on a lure without being hooked and eventually let the lure go. The heavier drag and heavier leaders allow Lee to set hooks better. The exception is when jigging for snapper, as the fish tend to be lip hooked and can be lost if you apply too much pressure.
- Lee finds snapper are very attuned to UV and reckons it's worth keeping an eye on the weather channel for the UV index. High UV days often fish well for snapper, especially if you use a lure with a splash of UV colour on it.

Specific Tips & Tackle For Port Phillip Bay

- There is generally not much water movement or structure in Port Phillip Bay, so it's possible to fish lighter tackle and use relatively small, light lures. For lure fishing a 4-6 kg spin stick, 4000 size spin reel loaded with 10lb braid and a 12-15 lb fluorocarbon leader will do the trick.
- When snapper are gathered together and tightly packed on the sounder they are often not feeding too actively. When fish are found scattered around a general area it's a good indication that they're feeding. Bigger fish tend to come from higher up in the water column, the size of fish tends to decrease the closer they are to bottom.
- Trolling lures can be an effective snapper fishing technique in Port Phillip Bay. Using small diving minnow style lures that swim mid-water is effective in depths of 5-6m. In deeper water Lee likes to fish a diving minnow about 10m behind a downrigger bomb so that it rides about 5-6 feet above the bottom. He often sets a second lure higher up in the water column and gets a surprising number of quality snapper on this lure.

Specific Tips & Tackle For Westernport Bay

- A 10kg spin stick with a 4000 size reel, 10lb braid and 30-40lb fluorocarbon leader will handle most Westernport snapper as well as the heavier lures.
- Early in the season the snapper in Westernport tend to move right up into the “fingers” of the bay where the water is warmer. As the season progresses the water becomes too warm and they migrate back to deeper water around the main shipping channels.
- Look for signs of hard structure in Westernport, which often consists of quite small patches of reef – especially if it’s holding bait. Snapper are often sitting on the rubble patches up-current of the serious structure.
- By working with the current you can fish a lot lighter – It’s possible to drop a relatively light flutter jig on top of fish from a drifting boat, where fishing a large bait at anchor would require a lot of weight.
- Westernport snapper move up and down the channel with the tide, so drift fishing and using your sounder to locate them can be very effective.

Lee’s Melbourne Snapper Fishing Lures

- A 7” curl tail grub or a 7” soft plastic jerk shad is a great option for Melbourne snapper. In Port Phillip Bay this can be fished on a small jig head and worked with fairly slow rod lifts to create good sized hops so they have a long fall back to the bottom. In Westernport it’s best to dropshot these lures on a heavy paternoster rig, place the rod in a rod holder and wait.
- Small flutter jigs (40g) such as the Storm Koika in a range of bright colours are great for Port Phillip Bay snapper. These jigs also fish well in Westernport Bay, but in larger sizes and heavier weights (eg 80g). Long, slender centre weighted jigs have a great action and fall slowly are great worked slowly and vertically to fish you’ve marked on the sounder. Long slow rod lifts and allowing the lure to flutter back down is the best strategy. Slow pitch jigs can simply be dropped to the required depth and the rod placed in the rod holder.
- Small hardbody lures are great for trolling snapper in Port Phillip. Lee likes small minnows like the Rapala X-Rap 10 that swim deeper than the downrigger bomb. He’ll set the bomb at a depth that puts the lure about 10 feet above the bottom and troll at very slow speed on the main motor. He’ll set another one mid water and troll just down current of boats at anchor while they fish for snapper.