

Australian Lure Fishing Podcast Episode 285



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Dick Pasfield

WA Fishing Writer

Dick has been fishing in Lake Kununurra and the Ord River System for decades and loves to spend time chasing a mixed bag of sooty grunter and barramundi in the same session. When he's not fishing, Dick is writing about fishing and has authored 95 articles so far for popular fishing magazines.



Dick's Lake Kununurra Sooty Grunter Tips

- The WA Sooty Grunter is a smaller fish than the eastern variety, with a 40cm fish being a good catch and a 50cm being the "unicorn" of WA sooty grunter.
- Lake Kununurra enjoys very stable water levels, which results in plenty of vegetation, both submerged and riparian (including freshwater mangroves and native figs) that overhang the water. Sooty grunter love to get beneath this umbrella of vegetation where they are safe from sea eagles.
- Anywhere there are flying foxes roosting in this overhanging vegetation there will be sooty grunter beneath.
- It's important to keep moving to find sooty grunter, don't sit under one tree and wait for fish to come to you. Dick likes to drift down the river and make casts under the overhanging vegetation until he finds fish then doubles down on that location.

- If you see lots of archerfish, move on. Sooty grunter tend to bully archerfish, so the presence of archerfish usually means there are no sooty grunter around.
- It's important to fish under trees as much as possible, and always in shadows, not so much in bright sunlight.
- Sooty grunter fishing is best in the warmer months of the wet season, provided the water doesn't get too dirty. November onwards is best, with fish moving into creek systems in February for spawning.
- Windy, blustery conditions or the sea breeze that kicks in late afternoon often turn on the sooty grunter by dislodging food items from trees.
- Dick often spends afternoons targeting sooty grunter from around 2pm, keeping an eye on the sounder in case a barra turns up. Once the light becomes too low for casting under vegetation Dick will switch over and chase barra. Sooties can be taken through the night, but accurate casting among timber is difficult without light.

Dick's Sooty Grunter Fishing Tackle

- A single spin outfit is all that Dick uses for sooty grunter. It's made up of a 3-5kg rod with a medium taper, a 2000 size reel, 20lb braid and a 20lb fluorocarbon or nylon leader complete the outfit. This relatively heavy gear is required to be able to recover snagged lures without spooking fish when fishing heavy cover under trees. Sooties can also bite or rub through fine leaders, so 20lb leaders are appropriate.

Dick's Sooty Grunter Fishing Lures

- The minimum size lure to use for sooty grunter is 50mm. Very small, bream style lures tend to get inhaled deep and do damage to fish being released. Sooties will often hit a 125mm lure, though a 75mm one is a better all-round size.
- Dick finds that sooties tend to snip tails off soft plastics, so he avoids using them.
- The original Halco Combat is unfortunately no longer made, but is perfect for this style of fishing. This lure is relatively heavy for its size and has a tapered tail that allows it to be skip cast under structure. It also dives quite deep, which suits the deep drop-offs under the trees. Work this lure with lots of tip action and very little forward movement.
- When working along the edges of weedbeds Dick finds a 50mm Halco Poltergeist is a good option. The weedbeds in Kununurra tend to be 2-3m deep and the riverbed drops down another 4 metres or so beneath that, so this lure allows Dick to work the darker water at these depths. The Poltergeist is also good when thrown into gaps between trees and landed very close to shore, then allowed to drift under the overhanging vegetation. Dick adds

suspendots or splitshot to make the lure barely float. Twitch the lure occasionally as the current carries it along the bank beneath the tree canopy, then when it reaches the point where you expect fish might be, slow roll it out.

- A home made wooden popper 20mm in diameter, 30mm long and the last 10mm is tapered to create a cone-shaped lure that is deadly when flicked under the trees. This is Dick's "Fig Lure" – perfect for sooties that are camped under trees feeding on falling native figs. Dick skips these lures under the trees, but recognises that a skipped lure is not exactly landing naturally like a fig falling from a tree. The lure works, nonetheless, as long as it's under the canopy and given the occasional twitch. This lure is even more deadly when you find places where the canopy has been ripped open by a storm and you can lob a lure to land with the natural plop of a falling fig, particularly from September onwards when the figs are ripe and falling.