

Australian Lure Fishing Podcast Episode 332



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Dave “Hodgie” Hodge

The Barefoot Fisherman

Hodgie will be known to many ALF listeners as the host of “The Barefoot Angler” TV show. A cod enthusiast, since relocating to Townsville Dave has reinvented himself as a gun mangrove jack specialist – a pursuit that plays well with his famous accuracy casting skills. Hodgie writes for fishing magazines and speaks at boat shows and fishing events, where he frequently stars in trick casting exhibitions.



Hodgies Mangrove Jack Fishing Tips

- Mangrove jack fishing in north Queensland is about understanding the tides and how the fish respond to tides. Being able to locate fish in a system is critical, and they’re not always holding tight to snags.
- If mangrove jack fishing is your top priority, don’t be distracted by barra. Barra will happen as a by-catch when targeting jacks, so stay focussed on the red fish.
- Jacks don’t commonly reach the large sizes in north Queensland estuaries that they often do down in southern Queensland. Fish over 50cm are reasonably abundant, but 60cm plus fish are very rare. However, the numbers and aggression of jacks is higher in the north.
- “Neapish” tides tend to fish best, as jacks like some flow, but smaller water movement makes it easier to get lures where you need them and usually results in clearer water. Jacks

will move away from structure a little more when the water is flowing and tend to hang tighter to structure during periods of low flow.

- Hot, humid days with a small amount of tidal movement (1.2-1.5m) are uncomfortable for anglers, but offer the best jack fishing. Low light conditions and a gentle breeze often help to encourage jacks to feed more freely.
- Quality jacks can often school up in August/Sept as the water starts to warm. Often they're found in areas where deep mangrove roots are still in the water at low tide and there is a submerged log or other timber present also.
- Hodgie likes the last part of the run-out and the first part of the run-in tide best for jack fishing. At these times the bait is forced to follow the water out of the mangrove roots and the fish will often be waiting in small drains that aren't visible on higher tides. Sometimes these drains aren't much more than a foot wide or a foot deep.
- Mangrove jack can often be found patrolling the gently sloping flats at the edge of a dropoff. At these times anglers can target them on very light tackle, throwing small surface poppers.
- Don't fall into the trap of thinking that fish choose lures by price tag. Hodgie find anglers often overlook the mid-priced lures that are still very effective, thinking they need to buy high-end lures to have a chance with jacks.
- Use your electric motor to get close to the fish. Often in jack fishing a 15m cast is a long one, 5-10m, pin-point accurate casts are usually sufficient.
- Tips for accurate, short-range casting with baitcast gear: use a short rod with a soft tip, start with the lure an inch or less from the rod tip, back the cast control off and magnetic control (if fitted) down to 2 out of 10. Make the rod do the work and minimise the amount of arm movement. For overhead casting, roll your wrist to give the wrist full movement and aim 6ft above the target, feathering the spool with your thumb to slow the flight and drop the lure on the target. A backhanded flicking cast is ideal for low-trajectory casting or skip casting (refer to Hodgies Youtube channel for more info).

Hodgies Mangrove Jack Fishing Tackle

- Hodgie doesn't troll lures, his fishing is all casting and accuracy is critical, so he's quite particular about the rods he uses. A short, fast taper rod with a soft tip allows deadly accurate casting but has enough power in the butt to enable fish to be wrangled from cover.
- A Samurai Infinite 8-16lb rod or a Samurai Refraction is a good choice for those who have a little more budget. For those on a budget, the Atomic ArrowZ rods will do much of what's needed, but at a lower price point. A baitcast reel with a very light spool and good corrosion resistance such as Shimano, Daiwa and Abu. The Abu Premier or the Shimano Chronarch

are both excellent reels for this style of fishing. 20lb braid and an abrasion resistant 30lb fluorocarbon leader are perfect as an all-round outfit for northern jacks due to the smaller sizes.

Hodgies Mangrove Jack Fishing Lures

- A 5" Halco Madeye Paddle Prawn in luminescent colour with an Atomic Seeker 5/0 EWG worm hook in 1/4 oz weight is a great starting point for anyone learning to target jacks. The weight can be decreased for surface or shallow presentation or increased for deep water or stronger currents. Rigged weedless, this lure can be cast into heavy cover, skipped under overhanging vegetation and so on. This is the lure to use when there is some flow and the jacks are not taking surface lures.
- The 90mm Bassday Sugadeep is a great suspending hard body lure that can be allowed to "hang" motionless in a jacks face, which often results in an explosive bite the instant the lure gets twitched. These are a great option when fishing around snags on the slack water at the bottom of the tide. Hodgie also mentioned the Tilsan Barra as another excellent mangrove jack option in the hard-bodied lure class.
- The 60mm version of the Halco Roosta popper is a great surface lure, with the smelt colour effective when the water is clean and the fluorescent colours when the water is less than clear. Hodgie will always start with a surface lure and will switch to the Paddle Prawn or Sugadeep if the surface action isn't happening.