

# Australian Lure Fishing Podcast [Episode 501](#)



## Top 5 Cape York Barra Fishing Spots



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### “Barra Dave” Donald

Retired Barra Guide And Cape York Fishing Author

There would be few anglers more qualified to talk about barramundi fishing the Weipa area than Dave. Aside from decades of distinguished service as a barramundi guide, Barra Dave has been writing about fishing the Cape York area since 1971 and is one of a handful of recognised pioneers of Far North Queensland fishing. Dave has lived, worked and fished the Cape for decades, calling Weipa home for much of that time.



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## Barra Dave’s Top 5 Cape York Barramundi Destinations

- Be aware that many of these fishing destinations are remote and that there will be very limited availability of gear and supplies, so be self-sufficient, carry all that you need plus spare parts, recovery equipment and so on.
- Boating on Cape York can be a compromise between access and safety. Large boats are generally not suited to the area because they’re not great for towing on rough roads. However, due to the crocodile hazards the smallest boats suited to fishing the area would be around 4-5m.
- If you find a nuisance crocodile that steals your fish or acts aggressively it is best to move on rather than risk coming out second best in a clash.

- Many of the fishing sites are on lands owned by Traditional Owners and respect for their culture is important if anglers don't want to be permanently excluded from these sites. On many traditional lands alcohol is also not permitted and steep fines and penalties apply if it is brought to camp.
- As a general rule for barramundi fishing, if there's no run there's no fun. Dave finds the last half of the runout tide and the first half of the run in tide are best for barra fishing. However, in the wet season there can be an additional opportunity caused by tides pushing up the creeks and backing up the freshwater, then at the very start of the runout tide the fresh starts coming out fast and carries mullet and other bait with them.
- If you're fishing for barramundi in more than a metre or two of water you're probably fishing too deep!
- The closed season for barramundi starts earlier on the western side of the Cape than it does on the eastern side, so be sure to know your regulations when you're fishing the area. The Gulf barra season usually closes in early October, whilst the east coast season closes on 1 November, both areas re-open on 31 January each year, at midnight.

## Barra Dave's Top 5 Cape York Barramundi Destinations

### **Lakefield National Park And Princess Charlotte Bay**

- There are masses of rivers, waterholes and beaches in the Lakefield District and pretty much all hold barra if you're there at the right time.
- The fishing is often best in the leadup to the wet season and during the runoff, however access to the park is closed during the wet season, typically from 1 December until May or June, depending on the part of the park and the weather conditions. Be sure and check closure dates before planning a trip.
- Access to some waterways is still possible through private property when the park is closed, but may require quad bikes and permission is becoming increasingly harder to get.
- Land based fishing is possible in many areas, but care must be taken to avoid the dangers of crocodiles.
- Lakefield has what Dave refers to as "classic barra habitat" with tons of lagoons, salt marshes and swamps that act as nursery areas and dry season refugia.

### **Kowanyama And Mitchell River**

- This area is even more challenging to access than Lakefield. Bookings are limited by number and can be made through the [Kowanyama Council](#) or [Kowcamp](#) but usually sell out within two weeks of opening up in February or March each year.

- Dave is not aware of any guides operating on these systems and the area is remote, so you need to be self-sufficient and self-guided.
- The area is famous for black soils, which turn from concrete to slurry with the slightest amount of rainfall, so dry season is definitely the best option.

### **Karumba**

- Karumba has a reputation for being a big barra fishery, however it does get worked by commercial netters and increasingly it is becoming necessary to travel further to find big fish.
- Access to Karumba is pretty good these days, with sealed roads a lot of the way, the downside being that it's become a destination for grey nomads and you need to book well in advance to secure accommodation.
- The best times to hit Karumba are shortly after the season opens at the start of February through to around May or June, or during the build up to the wet season as the waters are warming. The months of July and August are the most challenging for barra fishing right throughout the Cape as the cooler water temperatures slow the fish down. By mid-September the water warms and the fish start to chew again.
- Karumba is often regarded to be more of a trolling river as it can be necessary to cover a lot of water in search of the fish. However, fish can be caught by casting also.

### **Jackey Jackey Creek**

- The Jackey Jackey system is immense, with 72 individual watercourses and could be fished every day for a month without ever fishing the same place twice.
- The area can be accessed by four-wheel drive during the dry season or by flying in and hooking up with a guide. Alternatively, some punters like to put their four-wheel drive and boat on a barge in Cairns and fly up to Bamaga to pick them up, then drive back down. The last option is quite expensive but worthwhile if you're spending a reasonable amount of time in the area. Hire boats are available at Bamaga also.
- The main river systems Dave suggests anglers who are new to the area start with are Jackey Jackey Creek, Middle River and the Escape River. The new ramp behind the airstrip at Bamaga is a great place for anglers to start exploring.
- This is a tidal system, so unlike the Weipa area, there are two tides per day, which tends to increase the diversity of fish available.
- This can be a very windy place to fish, but there's always a lee shore to fish, just watch out for sand and mud banks if you don't want to get stuck and have to wait for the tide.

- Barra can be found right throughout the systems here, but focus on the drains during the last of the runout and first of the run-in tide and the snags at other times. Don't discount any snag, sometimes a small stick poking out of the water can hold multiple fish.

### **Wenlock River And Port Musgrave Area**

- The Wenlock system is one of the more accessible on the Cape, with increasing portions of the road to Mapoon being bitumised. There are two boat ramps, one at Cullen Point at the mouth of the Wenlock River and a mud ramp at Clough's Landing.
- There are cabins and facilities in Mapoon and a small shop for basic supplies. The cabins and also the camp ground at Cullen Point are very popular and it's necessary to book well ahead. Oppressive mosquitoes at Clough's landing would make camping extremely uncomfortable.
- The Wenlock is an extensive system that extends a long way eastwards and in its upper reaches holds sooty grunter and saratoga. Being a meandering system with plenty of billabongs, wetlands and waterholes it has good nursery areas that support the barra population.
- The Ducie River, Dulhunty River and Skardon River are also excellent barra waters, as is Namaleta Creek, opposite Cullen Point on Port Musgrave. Namaleta would be Dave's suggestion for newbies to the area as a starting point for an expedition.
- The area boasts huge mudflats, particularly on the northern side of Port Musgrave around the mouth of the Ducie. These contain plenty of drains and are an excellent place to fish on the last of the run out tide and the start of the run in tide.
- Further up the Ducie system before the Dulhunty confluence there are some small creeks flowing in that are always worth a look.
- This is a system where there is only one major tide per day. During the summer the major low tides occur during the night, which can make the fishing challenging. During winter this reverses and the major low tide is during the day.

## **Barra Dave's Cape York Barra Fishing Tackle**

- It's worth carrying a couple of baitcast rods for casting heavier lures and a spin rod for casting lighter soft plastics.
- For baitcast reels, look for something solid that can hold 180-200m of 30lb braid and a slightly longer rod from 5'10" to 6'3" in length with a reasonable amount of sensitivity in the tip.
- For spin gear, a 4000 size reel loaded with 20-30lb braid is ideal. Look for a longer rod of around 7', again with some sensitivity in the tip to provide cushioning and reduce pulled hooks.

- In many of the areas discussed herein you are likely to come across large barramundi and if you use a light leader you're likely to lose fish to being rubbed off on their raspy teeth. Dave recommends not going below 50-60lb fluorocarbon for leaders and has recently been using Schneider line.