

# Australian Lure Fishing Podcast [Episode 511](#)



## Five Wet Tropics Winter Fishing Spots



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### Kim Anderson

Long Time FN Queensland Fishing Icon

Kim is a former fisheries officer and gameboat deckie but has also been a very long-time fishing guide in the Wet Tropics region. He's heavily involved in barra stocking around Cairns and loves nothing more during the cooler months than to head for the mid to upper reaches of the rivers between Ingham and Innisfail in search of barramundi, mangrove jack, tarpon, sooty grunter and jungle perch.



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## Fishing Tackle For Wet Tropics Winters

- Throughout the river systems we'll be discussing in today's interview the fish species and hence the tackle and the techniques that are most suited are pretty consistent, so we'll cover them off up front!
- Kim likes the combination of Shimano Stradic 2500 reels and Zodias rods if he's fishing spin gear, or the Shimano DC Curado Baitcast reel with Zodias baitcast rod if he's switching to baitcast gear. 20lb braid and 30lb leader is usually all that's required in these systems.
- In 2022 we've experienced late wet season rain, which has cooled the water and increased the flow rates. Under these conditions Kim likes small hard bodied lures of around for all species, but especially for barra fishing. Species such as sooty grunter and jungle perch are more likely to be taken on a hard body as they often hit the tail

of a soft plastic where there is no hook. Reidy's Little Lucifer, Rapala SR8's, Shadow Raps and Shad Raps are all good options. Kim likes to upgrade to 4x strong hooks and likes his hard bodied lures for freshwater to be slow floating and for saltwater to be suspending.

- As the weather fines up and river levels drop the extensive weedbeds in these systems will start to fire. These are almost impossible to fish with hard bodies and require a switch to weedless rigged 3" paddletail soft plastics (4" for down around the mid reaches), brand is unimportant.
- In late winter it is worth fishing the river mouths on the neapish tides, with soft plastic prawns and soft vibes the killer lures in that period. For this scenario you'll want 40lb braid and 50lb leaders, locked drags and strong nerves. Zerek Prawns, Atomic Prongs and so on, rigged weedless are great. Vibes also work well, but be very selective about where you throw them.

## **Wet Tropics Fishing Spot #1: Herbert River**

**Species:** Barramundi, mangrove jack, tarpon

- This system is a 3 hour plus drive south of Cairns or an hour and a half from Townsville and offers an incredible range of different habitats and structures. Navigation requires plenty of common sense as there are numerous rock bars and other hazards.
- The places to find are areas where the fish can hold just out of the current, such as rocks, stumps, lava flows and so on. Trout will stay out of the main flow and will dart out to nail prey that is getting washed down with the current.
- Dirty water makes it worth targeting trout right through the day, while clear water in summer usually limits the productive trout fishing to low light periods.
- Head upriver on the bigger tides as there are lots of shallow sandbanks between the deeper holes, keep an eye out for ripples on the surface that indicate rocks and structure. Sometimes you might have to drag your boat across sandy parts (watch the crocs).
- Go as far upstream as you dare, then drift fish back down, using your electric to control the speed and direction of drift.
- Sooty grunter and mangrove jacks will be in the rapids tucked away in quiet little pockets. Mangrove jack especially like these areas if there is some weed mixed in.
- Barramundi tend to be in the slower water where there is some structure. Look for deeper holes upstream of rock bars and sound them out, you'll usually find fish there.

- Barramundi will always sit out of the current but close to it where the water movement brings the food to them.
- Boat ramps exist at Halifax and also in Lucinda.

## **Wet Tropics Fishing Spot #2: Murray River**

**Species:** Barramundi, mangrove jack

- The Wet Tropics Murray River (not the big Murray in southern Australia or the central Queensland one) is a wonderful fishery, but not somewhere to go if a beautiful, pristine boat is important to you.
- There is a rough, dirt ramp at the Bluff and another one at Bedford Creek but both are basic mud ramps.
- The mid reaches of the Murray are different from the other rivers and resemble Cape York systems with sheoaks and lots of overhanging and submerged timber. In contrast to the other systems, the Murray gets very dirty on bigger tides and only the upper reaches are fishable at these times.
- Neap tides fish best in the lower reaches, but the very small tide days can be tough. It's best on those days to head up river to where there is freshwater inflow to create the water movement you're looking for.
- Look for reverse root mangroves or flats barra down around the river mouth and use shallow divers such as gold Bombers or Leed's Hijackers blooped through the mangroves. Or soft plastics can work in this area also.
- Further upstream you'll find lots of bends and structure, this is where vibes and soft plastic prawns come into their own. Once in the fresh water you'll find lots of structure to fish with soft plastic prawns or weedless soft plastics. Sink these near a tree trunk and then work them back with a slow roll and rod twitches. If there is current you'll find barra are almost always on the back side of the snag.

## **Wet Tropics Fishing Spot #3: Tully River**

**Species:** Barramundi, big Sooty Grunter and quality mangrove jack and tarpon.

- There's only one boat ramp on the Tully and it's at Tully Heads. There are access places upstream, but lots of cars get bogged at these places. There are lots of sandbanks and

shallow structures, so this is definitely a small boat (to 4.5m) system, leave the “deep V” at home!

- Due to the massive freshwater flow, the Tully system only has a very short estuary, which tends to fish best around the neap tides during winter. Even in winter, the amount of fresh water in this system can make the current too strong to be fishable, so you might need to wait for the incoming tide to slow the water flow.
- Kim frequently motors for an hour and a half upstream, passing through rapids, rock bars and snags. There are lots of drains in this system that create awesome runoff conditions if the conditions are right.
- Once upstream you can drift back down, nose to the bank controlling the boat with the electric motor and sight casting to the fish.
- There are lots of weedbeds in the lower system that require a transition to weedless soft plastics and deep bends with back eddies that hold the tarpon. Sinking vibes beneath tarpon can result in some good barra.

## **Wet Tropics Fishing Spot #4: Liverpool Creek**

**Species:** Barramundi, mangrove jack and big tarpon

- Liverpool Creek can be a little tough to fish over winter, but is a particularly good system for quality mangrove jack and is often very clear, affording awesome sight fishing.
- As with the other systems discussed, small hard bodies work best in the upper reaches, but once you get down closer to the mouth the weed beds begin and weedless soft plastics are definitely the best option.
- Deeper bends down near the mouth hold some massive tarpon (70cm) that are definitely worth chasing.
- The “boat ramp” is rudimentary and is located down near the river mouth and there are lots of shallow sandy areas, so be careful with navigation.
- The estuary section is again quite short but has good structure that offers excellent barra fishing with prawns and vibes as well as small popping for small GT’s and queenfish.
- Once again, head upstream on a big tide and then drift down on the runout.

## **Wet Tropics Fishing Spot #5: Johnstone River**

**Species:** Barramundi, mangrove jack, sooty grunter and quality flathead

- This is a diverse system with the river having north and south arms, with flats and islands down around the mouth. Excellent boat ramps exist at Innisfail, but beware of numerous rock bars once you get further upstream.
- There are some nice flathead in this system that can be taken during winter by throwing shallow diving hard bodies on the flats around the island.
- Neap tides fish better in the lower reaches, as with most of these systems, whilst high tides enable the angler to get further upstream into the freshwater and drift fish back down.
- The upper, faster flowing sections are the place to find sooty grunter, mangrove jacks and the odd barra, again fishing in small pockets and eddies. Small hard bodies are the best option up here.
- Once back in the more meandering sections of river where the weedbeds begin the barra become more consistent and small soft plastic paddletails and prawns become the most effective approach once again.

## **Conclusion**

If you live in the Wet Tropics or are planning on visiting the area during the cooler, drier months of winter there is plenty on offer, from barra and horse jacks, to sooty grunter, jungle perch, tarpon and even flathead.

The systems at the southern end of the region tend to have clearer water and offer the better winter fishing, but boat ramps are few and far between and care should be taken of the numerous rock bars and snags that have claimed plenty of propellers and gearboxes over the years!