

Australian Lure Fishing Podcast [Episode 522](#)



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Phil Laycock

Far North Queensland Fishing Identity

Phil has been fishing the Wet Tropics region of Far North Queensland for almost 50 years, having grown up and spent his working life in Cairns. He's had stints various roles including a period as a fishing guide, a role with OzFish Unlimited and participation in the (successful) campaign to have Trinity Inlet and adjacent areas declared a "Net Free Zone".



Phil's Tips For FNQ Sooty Grunter

- In this episode Phil focuses on targeting sooties in the larger river systems in the wet tropics that start west of the great divide and flow eastwards towards the Great Barrier Reef. The sections of river covered by this episode are those to the west of the Great Divide, such as the Herbert above Blencoe Falls, the Barron between Tinaroo Dam and Kuranda and the Burdekin west of the great divide.
- The Herbert and Barron rivers in these areas are narrow and rocky, punctuated with deep pools and interspersed with shallows and tree islands. The Burdekin is wider and sandier with multiple channels, rock bars and shallower holes.
- Don't overlook the smaller tributaries also, such as the Mitchell, which are all about fishing in tight cover and targeting fish in skinny, clear water.
- You'll find sooty grunter through these systems at any time of year, but the cooler months are more pleasant for walking the streams and casting to fish, especially by

September when the water really starts to clear. In the hotter months it's best to fish the areas where fruit is falling from trees during the early morning and late afternoon.

- Through the dry season in the Barron and Herbert the slower moving reaches with deeper holes and steep banks lined with gnarly trees tend to fish best at either end of the day, while the shallower, faster flowing areas with tree islands, rocks and small pockets or eddies fish well right through the day, even when the sun is high.
- The dry season in the Burdekin can be explored with Google Earth to find an access point (national parks are good for access), then the sandy riverbeds can be walked until you reach the wide rock bars that create faster currents and eddies that hold sooties.
- It's not always necessary to walk for tens of kilometres of river to find some fish. Goshen Station and nearby national parks offer paid camping opportunities with river access and great fishing opportunities. Even the crossing at Blencoe Falls gives good access to some decent sooty grunter fishing.

Phil's Sooty Grunter Tackle For FNQ

- A light spin rod of 6-12lb with enough backbone to turn a sooty is a good option for lots of situations. Phil uses a 6'3" St Croix rod couples with a 2500 size Shimano spin reel, light braid and a 10-20lb leader, depending on water clarity and how the fish are reacting.
- From a canoe or kayak a small baitcast outfit is a great option for accurate casting. Phil uses a light Loomis rod with a 50 size Shimano baitcast reel, light braid and similar leader materials to the spin gear.
- Sooties are suckers for a well-presented fly and a 7 weight rod is perfect for sooties and gives plenty of options in the saltwater as well.
- If conditions are tough and the fish aren't 100% cooperative then slow down, try different colours and if you get any sign of interest take note of the type of structure and look for more of the same.
- The kayak Phil mentioned is a [K2 Fishing Excursion Pro Kayak](#)

Phil's Sooty Grunter Fishing Lures

- A Rapala Shad Rap SR5 is difficult to get your hands on in Australia but an excellent lure in these Western river systems for targeting sooty grunter. Alternatively, the Rapala Flat Shad in 5cm will work equally well. Lively lures and Predatek are great Aussie brands that also have suitable lure options. You're looking for small, floating, deeper diving hard

bodies that swim well in a current. The shad body shape mimics the rainbowfish species that are common in these waters and when the water is clear Phil like natural colours such as crawdad, but anything with a bit of purple in it is good. A lure that gets down to depth quickly is also important, allowing the lures to be worked through the tiny pockets where sooties will sit without getting hung up on structure.

- A small popper of 50-55mm is great when the sooties are thick and particularly early in the morning. Most decent brands work, but the Jackson PY Pygmy Popper. You don't want to work these lures too aggressively, so a lure that spits instead of popping will work well in any colour, though Phil Likes either black or frog colours. Sometimes retrofitting the popper with a small assist hook on the back can pay dividends.
- A 3" soft plastic paddletail such as a ZMan Slim Swimz rigged on a 1/8oz or 1/6oz jig head with a TT gold spinner blade in size #1 attached. These work extremely well in small waters, rolled through rapids and anywhere the water is flowing a bit faster. They can also be helicoptered down against the rock walls in the Burdekin system and are best worked on a steady retrieve. Colour is not too important, but Phil has been doing well with the bright chartreuse colour.