

# Australian Lure Fishing Podcast [Episode 581](#)



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## Tristan Sloan

Aquatic Scientist, Fishing Writer, Advocate And Advisor

Tristan started fishing as a kid in the Ballina area, eventually writing for Fishing World and Fishing Monthly magazines. His passion for fishing led to his employment in a range of rec fishing advocacy, advisory and policy roles, much of it based in Darwin. In his time there Tristan took full advantage of the legendary runoff barramundi fishing and fell in love with fishing the Chambers Bay area whenever he could.



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## Tristan's Best Tips For Chambers Bay Barramundi Fishing

- The Mary River system (Sampan Creek) flows to sea at Chambers and Finks Bays. The boat ramp at Shady Camp is the launching point to access this area. Once out of the river mouth there are small coastal creek systems to both the left and right of the river that pump water out directly to sea and hold massive barra.
- April is the prime month, but March can fish well if you time it right and May can be good too, but is at the tail-end of the runoff. In a very good wet season, the opportunity can sometimes extend into June.
- Metre-plus threadfin are in huge numbers and can actually become a nuisance when you're targeting barra.

- It's super important to watch the river heights as barramundi behaviour is closely linked to hydrology. Smart barramundi fishers look for times when the water level is below "bank full" as this causes water to run out of the wetlands and floodplains. The result is food being brought to the main channel and barra congregating at the mouths of feeder creeks to feed.
- When river heights in the Mary and Daly are below 6m (and falling) the conditions are good for barra fishing. If the river has dropped below 5m you'll often get a hot bite just as the water starts to rise. It's not something that can be planned, you must be lucky to be in the right place at the right time.
- Prime fishing opportunities at the creeks emptying into Chambers and Finks Bays come during the runoff season on the big 7-8m spring tides around the full or new moon. Under these conditions massive amounts of runoff water discharge into the bays during the runout tide and carry all kinds of baitfish to the barra that have gathered on the flats to either side of the main channel.
- It's important to anchor your boat along the edges of the main channel prior to the turn of the tide and be ready to fish by the time the water starts to run out. This means leaving Shady Camp early in the morning for the 45-minute run down to the bay. Be sure to arrive at Shady on the last of the run in tide or you may miss the launch window. It can be a busy ramp during the runoff, so get there extra early!
- Fan casts out all over the flats at the top of the tide as the barra and bait will be moving around the whole area. As the tide falls, concentrate more on the edges of the main channel and on the channel itself as the fish retreat to the deeper water when the flats dry out.
- The decision whether to go left or right at the mouth of Sampan Creek depends on wind and condition. Make sure you plot a course through the mouth of Sampan Creek on your GPS before leaving home so you can navigate back on the lower tide.
- **WARNING:** watch the water depth, because if you get distracted by the fishing and stay just a little too long you might find yourself stranded and waiting 12 hours for the next run-in tide.
- When you leave the spot as the water gets too shallow, use the electric motor to troll your way back along the channel and you'll often pick up some fish when everyone else is tearing away at high speed.
- Wind is not your friend in this scenario. Usually the barra are in the clear, tannin-stained water that comes from the creeks, but wind stirs up the bottom and turns the water to

mud. The fishing is usually poor in these conditions, but switching to a noisy, rattling lure in black colour can often save the day.

## Tristan's Barramundi Tackle

- It's fine to use either baitcast or spin tackle, but Tristan finds that spin tackle allows for longer casts, which is super important. Long casts keep lures in the water longer, and also take advantage of the stealth factor.
- 4500 size Penn Spinfisher reels are great for this style of fishing and have 17kg of drag and a fast retrieve, which is plenty for barra. Tristan couples these reels with Offshore spin sticks from Frogley's Offshore, which are 7' long and 10-25lb line class. Casting a soft plastic 50m is no problem with this gear.
- Fine 8 wrap braids are good as they are thin and allow for long casts. Leaders should be 50-60lb line fluorocarbon for hard bodies or similar breaking strain mono for soft plastics.

## Tristan's Barramundi Lures

- The Zerek Skittish Dog (120mm) is a great surface lure to throw around early in the runout tide when the popeye mullet first get washed from the system. It's not a high percentage lure but is fun to fish because of the spectacle of a surface lure getting crashed by a big barra.
- The most productive and consistent fishing comes by slow rolling big soft plastics and Tristan likes the 130mm Atomic Real Baits. It's important to remove the treble hook and replace it with a 4X Gamakatsu, plus upgrade the split ring. The Real Baits are well set up for jewfish but the hooks aren't suitable for barra fishing. Varying the retrieve speed enables the lure to be worked at all depths as the water is usually only 2.5m deep, and sometimes a "burn and kill" approach will do the trick.
- When the fish are super aggressive at Bomber 16A in chartreuse or lime green is a good option.