



Catching whiting on poppers has changed from being an accidental novelty to a predictable, repeatable certainty.

Captain Kev was generous with his time and knowledge when I began researching this feature, as was my mate Bushy. They'd just come off the back of a couple of amazing 50-fish days on poppers (mixed bags of whiting, bream and smaller numbers of flathead). To say they were refining the technique would be an understatement. Every hour that Bushy wasn't asleep or out on the water catching fish this past summer, he was sitting on his verandah whittling poppers from timber to provide prototypes for his soon-to-be-released signature series bloopers; as part of the new Squidgy Stiffy series.

With guidance from these anglers, I was soon cracking the code regularly on my own. Even more heartening, I was able to take a few novices out, give them some rudimentary instruction, put the right gear in their hands and have them catching thumping big whiting, good bream, the odd flathead and chopper tailor on their first try. When my son, Tom, who hasn't fished much in the past

five or six years, bagged lovely whiting and bream first try, then went wading on his own and scored a remarkable 'PB' flathead of 85 cm on a tiny popper, I knew we had it right!

Why it works

Anyone who's spent time on our southern estuaries will have seen the odd prawn flicking across the surface during the day. You may even have seen the drama that unfolds as one of these crustaceans is hunted down by a fish. First the terrified prawn jumps and skips, with a series of swirls and 'boofs' close behind it. Nine times out of 10, the show ends with the prawn disappearing in a watery detonation. Sometimes the culprit is a tailor. But the unseen pursuer is often a bream, whiting, estuary perch or even a flathead.

Most estuary fish eat prawns and, when chased, prawns often head for the surface and start jumping. Other things that skitter, crawl or bloop across the

GEARBOX

Rod: 1.9-2.3 m (6'2"-7'6") flick stick with a high graphite content, cork grips and a relatively short, single-handed butt

Reel: a good quality 1000 to 2500 size threadline (spinning) reel

Line: 2-3 kg fused or braided gel-spun (GSP)

Leader: no more than a metre of 5-8 kg clear nylon or fluorocarbon

My favourite

Rod: Shimano Starlo Stix Tournament Pro Lite-Spin

Reel: Shimano Twinpower 2500 or Stella 2500

Line: 3 or 4 lb Berkley Crystal Fireline

Leader: 70-80 cm leader of 14 or 16 lb Nitlon fluorocarbon (connected to the mainline by a Double Uni Knot)

The popper is knotted directly to the end of this with a Uni or Half Blood Knot. I avoid using clips or loop knots. A tight connection makes the lure pop better and track straighter, giving better hook-ups, especially on whiting. It works for me!

CAPTAIN KEV

If you'd like to find out more about 'Captain' Kev Gleed's Wilderness Fishing Tours, phone: 0424 625 160, or visit www.wildernessfishingtours.com