

Exmouth revisited



DURING my last trip to Exmouth I guided clients with Dan O'Sullivan aboard his charter boat *Freespool II*. We had six days blue water fly fishing and ended up catching five

billfish on the fly for the guys – four blacks to 80 pounds and a sailfish that was at least 80 to 90 pounds. The fishing was relatively slow and just proved to me that when the place is quiet the marlin fishing still stacks up to anywhere else I've fished for billfish on the fly.

During the trip I arranged to have a couple of days fishing for myself with Brett Wolf from True Blue Bones (check out www.truebluebonefish.com.au) to get a feel for what was on offer as far as Exmouth's inshore fly fishing was concerned. As reported in last month's column I had a great day chasing bonefish and caught my first Aussie bone, an average fish for the area of about six pounds.

“We were living the dream ... drinking icy cold beers and eating freshly caught and cooked Exmouth Gulf prawns.”

The second day fishing with Brett I joined his clients and my good friends from Lord Howe Island, Viv and Gary Crombie, who had returned for a week's fishing to Exmouth after having a wonderful trip with Brett two years prior.

Primarily, Brett's business is all about fly fishing for bonefish, but Exmouth has so much more on offer for fly rodders. During a week's fishing with Brett you have the chance to look at many diverse fly fishing options.

On the day with the Crows we fished to the south-east of Exmouth in the calm waters of the Gulf. Launching his boat from the beach after a 40-minute drive we were close to numerous island flats and channels that just screamed of great fishing potential. Targets for the day included golden trevally, giant herring, GTs, brassy trevally, mackerel, jacks, permit and queenfish. Personally, I was interested in sight casting while the Crows were happy to get their string pulled by anything at all.

As can sometimes happen, even the best fisheries are slow and the spots Brett

hoped would fire during the morning session where really quiet, due possibly to larger tides and dirty water. We still managed to pull fish in a few locations around flats and island points with a little run over them. It's not that we didn't have plenty of action – it's just that the fish were small. Using flies, soft plastics and poppers we caught a bunch of greedy little trevally (golden, giant and brassy), queenfish and got bit off on little grey and Spanish mackerel. Highlights from the morning were that Crom jumped off a couple of giant herring on the fly rod and Viv caught two trevally on one popper, a GT and a brassy.

Although Brett was disappointed with the fishing we were having a great time and while anchored up for lunch we were living the dream, surrounded as we were by the flat calm seas of the beautiful Gulf, drinking icy cold beers and eating freshly caught and cooked Exmouth Gulf prawns.

Brett was persistent and still really keen to put us on to shots at cruising queenfish

and golden trevally and headed back to a spot that had not produced during the morning. He set up a drift to allow Viv a chance to cast poppers over a drop off while we looked for signs of cruising fish. What followed is hard to recount because one minute we were surrounded by nothing and the next there were tailing fins all over the place. The water had gone to absolute glass and the big tails of queenfish reflected light in all directions. Slow moving, it looked like they were asleep but the second a fly touched down in front of them they tore the water to foam in excited twisting slashes to take the small Clousers.

It had been a long time since I had taken big queenfish on the fly and in such conditions I was having an absolute ball. These guys liked a slow, steady retrieve and you'd get three or four bites a cast before a fish turned and allowed you to set the hook. Queenies may be the perfect fly rod target; they're reel-screaming fast, they jump all over the place and they look big and impressive out of the water.



Live the dream ... Viv Crombie and Brett Wolf with an Exmouth queenie as Crom looks on.

All these fish were in the 15 pound range and easy a metre long. Crom and I took turns casting to tails and dorsals while Viv got her share of fantastic surface bites and captures on 4kg spinning tackle.

Every now and then the blitz would slow and Viv covered the ground with her popper to reignite interest. At one stage she had masses of fish swarming all over the place with mackerel crashing her popper, queenfish following fast behind and then a whole school of big golden trevally muscled them all out the way to intercept the popper right beside the boat.

Both Viv and Crom where keen to land a big golden on the light 4kg gear and once hooked up they paid close attention at trying to land the 10kg trevally. Pound for pound, goldens pull as hard as any and Viv did a fantastic job expertly applying maximum pressure for at least 15 minutes until she had the fish close to the boat. Just as it looked like we may get a shot of landing it the big golden made a strong surge deep and broke the fragile line.

While Viv fought her fish we saw heaps of queenfish on the surface. Once re-rigged, we were fast back into the action with more queenfish and goldens around us for easy hook-ups on flies and poppers. Any day you leave them biting is a good one and we had had a beauty as we glided back to the beach over flat calm sea.

It's been a while since I have had a chance just to go fishing for fun. And it's been more years than I care to remember since I've had a full-on session on tropical superstars like those Exmouth Gulf queenfish and trevally. With Exmouth promising so much pristine fishing for so many great fly rodding targets I strongly recommend anyone serious about their fly fishing to give Brett Wolf a call and discuss the options in more detail. He'll let you know the best time and seasons to achieve your goals and ensure your time on the water will be one to remember.