



Float line fishing for Snapper

By Jim Gardner - Ned Kelly's Bait n Tackle

In this article, we will talk about catching snapper using a technique called 'float line fishing'. It's that time of year when snapper will school in large numbers and move closer to the coastline. This provides a great opportunity to catch a feed of these succulent fish using the 'float line' technique. Float line fishing is easier to do and more successful in shallower water up to 40 metres in depth.

Another prerequisite for success using this technique is slower ocean currents which typically occur during winter and early spring. We have had good success fishing in around 30 metres of water with the current running at about half to one knot. We typically sound an area of reef until we mark a school of fish. Once a school has been located, we motor up current approximately 60 to 80 metres if the water depth is 30 metres and anchor the boat. Fortunately it is much easier now that we have an electric motor with a 'spot lock' function.

Once anchored, it's time to start a burley trail. Two methods can be used, either using a burley pot or hand feeding the burley. Pilchards cut into very small pieces along with any old flesh baits also cut into small pieces work very well. We supplement the flesh burley with chicken pellets soaked in a fish oil. When hand burleying, just throw a few pieces of cut up flesh and a handful of pellets every 3 to 4 minutes and the current will carry the burley downstream attracting the snapper. Various baits can be used including whole or half pilchards or cut up flesh baits.

The most critical aspect of float line fishing is determining the size of sinker to use and how much line to let out. We use two rods to help work this out. As a rule of thumb, with the current somewhere between half and one knot, we will rig one rod with a 3 ball sinker running to the hook and do a long cast down current, then put the rod in the rod holder. The other rod is rigged with a 2 ball running sinker. Open the bail arm on the reel and feed the line out from the back of the boat. The key is getting the bait to sink steadily and the current to take the bait back to the waiting fish. It's also critical for the bait to be presented up from the bottom in

the water column as fish moving into a burley stream won't be on the bottom. Be prepared to experiment with the amount of line let out. If there are no bites after letting out say 30 to 40 metres in 30 metres of water, let more line out until you get a bite. Be prepared though as snapper feeding in a burley trail generally take a bait quite aggressively. The sinker weights and amount of line mentioned above are a guide, less or more current than used in this example will require adjustment in sinker size and line length. Once you are starting to get bites and hook fish, the critical elements for successful float line fishing have been met.

Just to throw more complications into the mix, conditions such as a change in wind direction or current speed may require an adjustment. If you stop getting bites, it may not be due to the fish not feeding anymore. Many times we've encountered this so we change sinker size and/or length of line let out and we started catching fish again.

Float line fishing is a fun way to catch snapper, especially when a rod sitting in the rod holder buckles over when a big snapper takes the bait or you are feeding line and suddenly the line picks up speed when a fish takes the bait. Remember the key points of maintaining a good burley trail, using the right size sinkers and feeding the right amount of line out and your esky will be graced with some tasty snapper.

Tight lines everyone.