

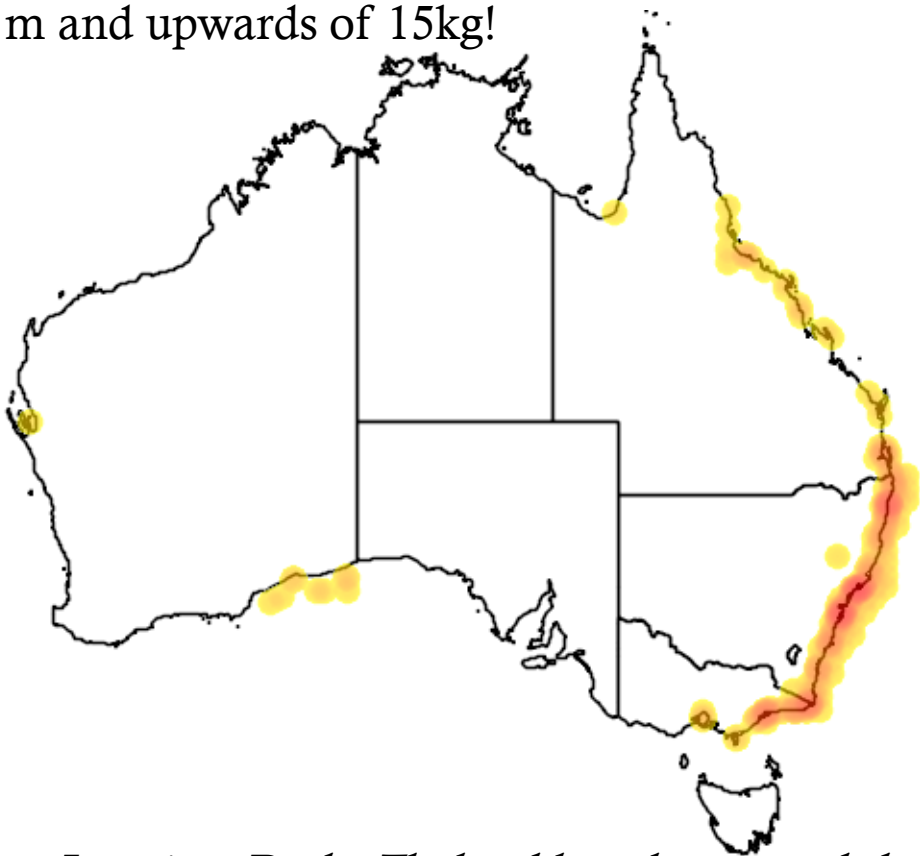
Flathead

Tips for chasing lizards



About Flathead

- Flathead, as their name suggests, are a flat fish that spend most of their time on or near the bottom, commonly found around sand or mud flats in estuaries.
- Dusky Flathead grow the largest, over 1m and upwards of 15kg!
- They range from Cairns in the North, all the way to Port Phillip Bay in Victoria, and are also occasionally encountered further past these locations.
- You'll find them in just about every estuary, creek, inlet or bay along the east coast, making them a popular target.
- Our region specifically is quite unique as it's a crossover region for a number of the other species – You may also come across Northern & Southern Sand, Tiger & Bluespot Flathead!



*Locations Dusky Flathead have been recorded.
Courtesy of australianmuseum.net.au*

About Flathead

Be Cautious When Handling!

- Flathead have small teeth like a rasp;
- Spines on either side of their head;
- Small spine on back at start of dorsal fins.



When Should I Target Flathead?

- **Flathead can be caught all year round!**
- During the cooler months, fish can be affected by lower water temperatures and not be as active. Look for warmer water or stable water temps.
- Tides are an important factor – Run out is a popular tide but I like the first hour or 2 after any change.
- Time of day – Secondary to tides in my opinion, but still important! Mornings and afternoons tend to be better times, especially if you can align them with tide changes!
- Night time is also a very productive time to chase flathead as they will move around a little more and hunt in the darkness!



Where Should I Fish?!

The Million Dollar Question!

Flathead spend most of their time on or near the bottom, so that's the first thing to think about!

Then look for the following –

- Sand or Sand/Mud bottom makeup, but also patchy rock/rubble with sand on top or between the rocks
- Shallow flats with weed beds
- Drop offs into deeper water
- Eddy's created by snags, riverbends, jetty's or bridges
- Shade lines from trees or other structure

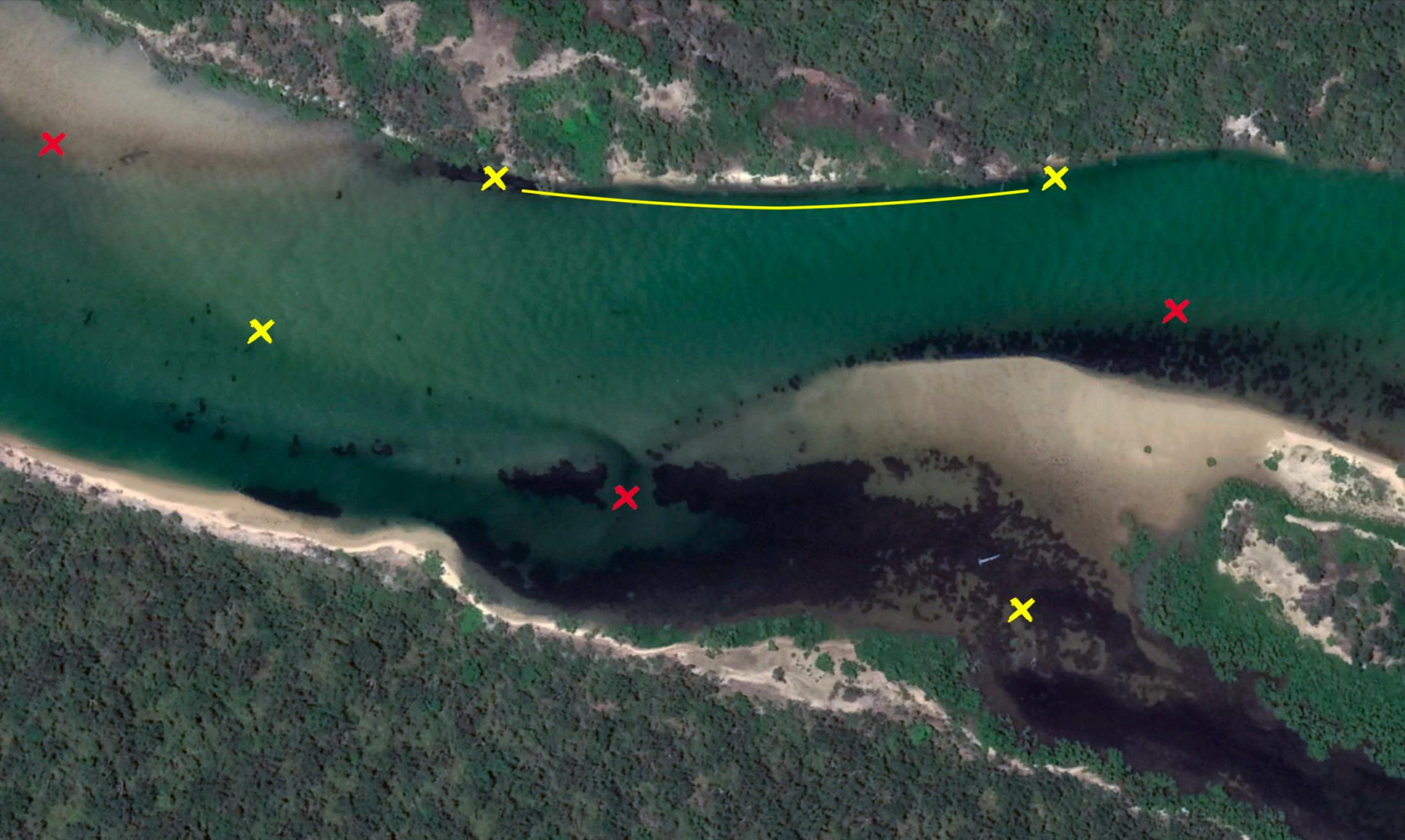




A section of a small estuary with some promising Flathead spots – Can you pinpoint the key areas to fish?



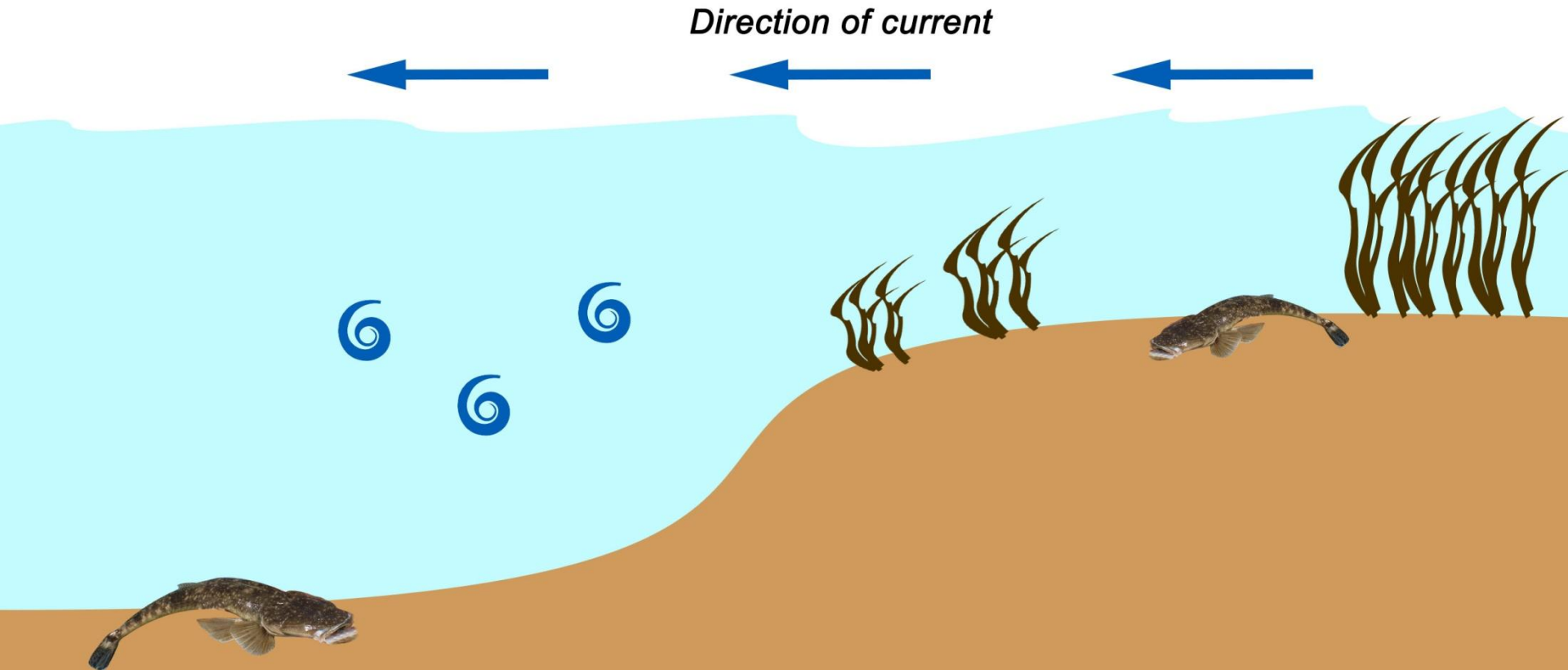
Heres a few keys spots marked. Drop offs from flats, channels, edges and weedbeds are all key places to fish, but there's even more subtle places to try...



The top bank looks to have a deep channel in close, and the bank would also have snags and create eddy's. There's a drop off in the middle off the river, and also deep into the weeds – this would be a great spot at the top of the tide to wade around!

A Classic Flathead Fishing Scenario!

This cross section could represent any 'Drop-off' from shallower into deeper water, or more commonly, a run out tide, with water draining off a shallow sand flat. Fish will hang in and around weed beds, and in the deeper water after the drop-off waiting for a meal to escape the draining sand flat!



Where Should I Fish?!



The good thing about flathead...

They are everywhere!

- You will find them from the mouth of a river all the way up into brackish water
- During the warmer months they spawn and will often be found in large numbers in the lower reaches of estuaries (closer to the mouth)
- But fish will still be found right throughout river systems however during this time, so don't be afraid to look further upstream!

Where Should I Fish?!

Another important thing to remember is to **stay on the move**. Although Flathead will move around also, they spend a lot of time sitting in one spot waiting to ambush prey, so keep covering ground.

- Drift with the tide, troll or wade, but keep on the move until you find fish.
- Once you find fish, work the area thoroughly.
- If you are catching small ones, persist in that area. They often hang around larger fish...



Where Should I Fish?!

An amazing bit of underwater footage filmed by Ian Banks – A great insight into what we cant see!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RiXzhB3p8YI&feature=youtu.be>

Gold Coast Seaway

Dusky Flathead
Platycephalus fuscus

Filmed by Ian Banks

What Tackle, Lures & Flies?

Flathead can be caught on a huge range of lures, flies and baits, but I'll just touch on the lures and flies.

Basically, any lure that you can get to the bottom has a fair chance of catching a flathead. Diving Hardbodies, Vibes, Soft Plastics and Sinking Flies will all work.



What Tackle, Lures & Flies?

Fly Outfits:

- #7 weight is a good starting point, but anywhere from #6 to #9 weight depending on conditions
- For calm conditions, shallow water and smaller flies, a #6 will often do, but if its windy or you are casting larger flies (which is often the case) a heavier outfit will make life easier.



What Tackle, Lures & Flies?

Fly Lines – Different lines for different situations:

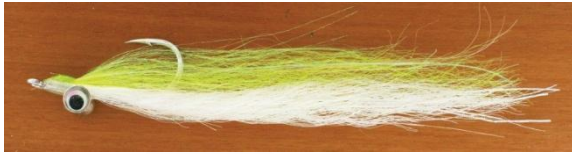
Just like any flyfishing, use the line to achieve the desired presentation.

- For shallow water like sand flats shallow enough to wade, use a full floating line. Your leader should be long enough for a sinking fly to stay on the bottom, and the floating line will be up away from the fish as to not spook them.
- If fishing deeper water like a drop off or a little deeper than you can wade, go for a Floating/Intermediate or full intermediate to allow the fly to get down deeper.
- If fishing deep water like deep banks, bridge pylon eddy's etc, you may need to go for a full sinking line to achieve the desired depth.



What Tackle, Lures & Flies?

Some Classic Flathead Flies:



Clousers & Minnows



Shrimp & Prawns



Things



What Tackle, Lures & Flies?

Fly Retrieves For Flathead:

- For fishing a shrimp or prawn imitation in shallow water and a floating line, use long, slow strips with random and erratic short fast strips. A classic fleeing shrimp or prawn style retrieve that works well for flathead.
- When fishing clousers, minnows, things etc. Try a mix of long slow strips with pauses of varying times, so the fly glides along just above the bottom then pauses and rests on the bottom;
- With an intermediate line, try a short fast strip with a long pause, to pull the fly sharply up through the water column, then allow it to sink back down and rest on the bottom again.



What Tackle, Lures & Flies?

Spinning / Threadline Tackle:

You can get away with a range of spion tackle for flathead, from light to heavy. I use the same gear that I use for bream and bass, when fishing for flathead –

- Light outfit –
 - 6'6" to 7'6" 2-4kg Rod
 - 1000-2500 size reel
 - Up to 8lb braid

This is perfect for fishing shallow flats with smaller lures.



What Tackle, Lures & Flies?

Spinning / Threadline Tackle:

You can get away with a range of spinning tackle for flathead, from light to heavy. I use the same gear that I use for bream and bass, when fishing for flathead –

- Medium outfit –
 - 7' to 7'6" 3-6kg Rod
 - 2500-3000 size reel
 - Up to 15lb braid

This is ideal for handling heavier lures and jigheads when needing to cast further, or fishing deeper water or harder running currents.



What Tackle, Lures & Flies?

Hardbodies:

- If it can get to the bottom it has a chance to fool a flathead!

Technique:

- A 'slow roll' with the occasional pause
- Make sure its bumping along the bottom
- Play around with speed, twitches, length of pauses etc.



What Tackle, Lures & Flies?

Vibes & Blades:

- Normally sinking so perfect for flathead!

Technique:

- Allow time to sink to bottom, then a slow lift and drop, winding in a little slack line in between and pausing.
- Slow rolling keeping it close to the bottom, pausing occasionally if needed to allow time to sink back down.



What Tackle, Lures & Flies?



Soft Plastics:

- Change weight easily to suit conditions.
- Endless options for shape, size, colour etc.

Technique:

- Similar to vibes, slow lift and drop working along the bottom.
- Curl tail and paddle tails work well with a slow roll close to the bottom.
- Use flicks, shakes and crawls with prawn or crustacean style plastics.



Recap – Key Points To Remember!

- Look for sand, sandy mud, weed beds or patchy rock bottom.
- Stay on the bottom.
- Stay on the move!
- Fish as light as you are confident to.
- Don't forget to get awesome pictures of your catch!

