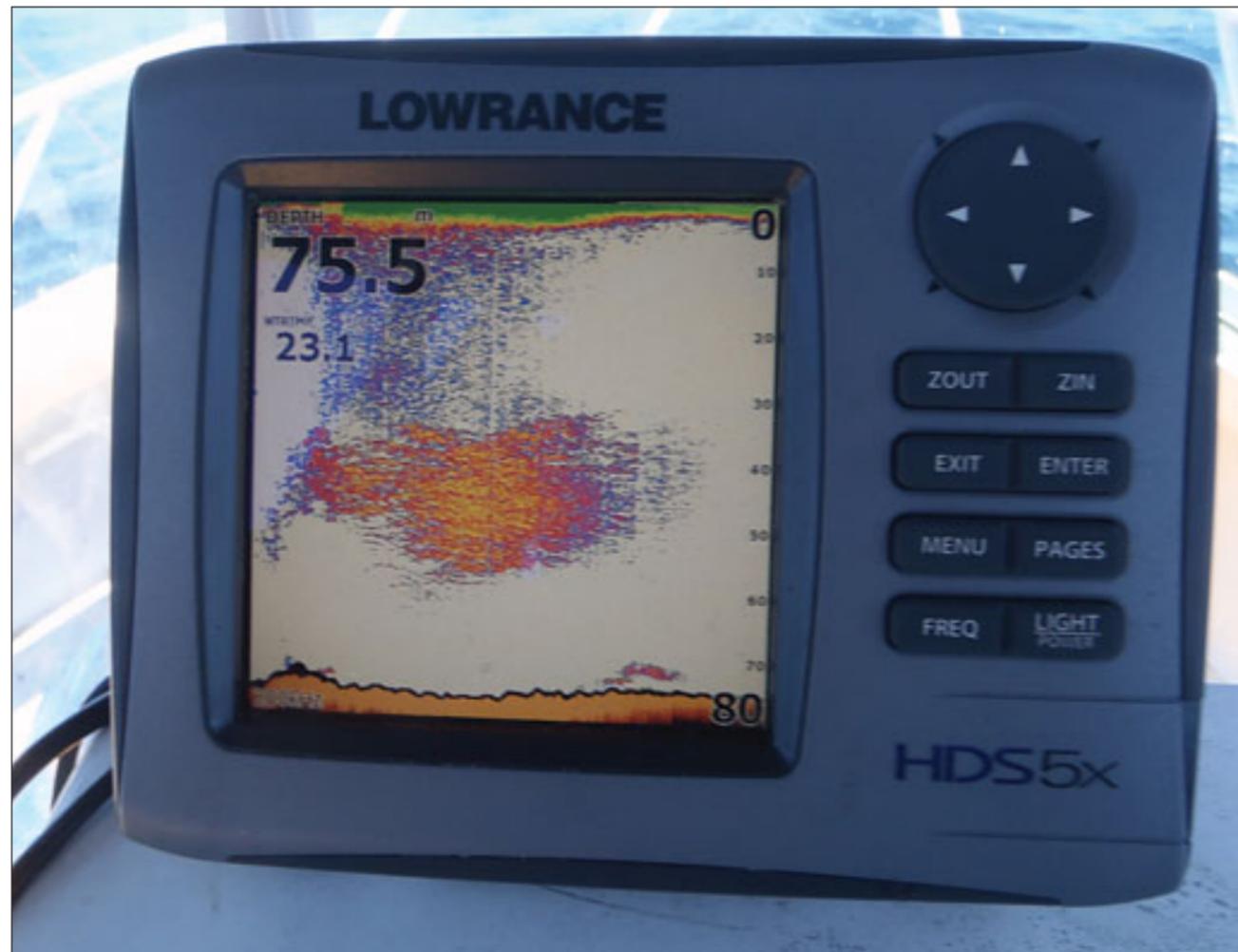


# Getting **The Best Intel** From Your Depth Sounder

The Downrigger Shop's **Andrew Hestelow** spends more time studying his fave **Lowrance HDS5x** somewhere off North or South Head in Sydney, than most of us spend staring through a windscreen at the 'parking lot' ahead as we drive to work . . . so we asked him how HE interprets all those colourful little thingies on the screen of his typical, modern and remarkably accurate Lowrance 'sounder . . .



**Above:** The image shows a large school of bait in open water some five miles east of North Head in summer 2014. Dropping micro jigs to 30 metres proved these to be large slimy mackerel. Fast moving sea birds marking the surface showed the school was in transit, heading southwards. A large predator of unknown type can be seen on the bottom, possibly a shark.



**Above:** This image is taken at Twelve Mile Reef, being that distance from east of Sydney Heads. The image shows the importance of tuning the colour palette on your sounder. Like many other deeper reefs, Twelve Mile has a problem with leatherjacket infestations at times. There are all sorts of old wives tales about, saying they will bite at shiny swivels and brass rings, or the white mark between colour change braid, or where the line has been touched by bait scented hands. Take it from a bloke who has fished this spot hundreds of times – they will bite at anything.

But there is one way to, if not defeat them, then to substantially reduce tackle losses. That is, by tuning your sounder so it can discriminate between fish species. On a Lowrance, select a palette which gives you rich, ochre type reds and yellows. Adjust gain a little stronger than shown here to maximise returns. In the case of this image, I had the gain backed off, because a short time previously the sounder on

another fishos boat was interfering with ours. When that happens you will register vertical broken dark lines from the top, to the bottom, of your screen. When it all comes together small fish on the bottom - like pinkie snapper, juvenile morwong and nannygai - show as red. Large kingfish will show mid water, often around 80 metres deep as irregularly shaped blue blobs. The blobs are their air chamber. But most importantly, the leatherjackets will appear as schools and show as yellow on your screen. When that happens, instantly notify the crew to wind their jigs up fast. We now do this as soon as any yellow appears in the mid-water, on the right hand side of the screen. That's saved us a lot of money. As to kingfish, on one memorable morning we spotted six blue blobs around 75-80m deep, some 150metres south of the main hump. Four fishos aboard, and four jigs sent down. Result, four out of the six kingfish boated.

(Continued Over)



*Above:* It's no secret that so many hot live bait spots are found where structure is over an open sandy bottom. That's the case with the famous Fridge, at Clontarf in Sydney's Middle Harbour. Supposedly a result of someone dropping their old refrigerator over the side, most of it has of course corroded away and only a tiny bump on the sand is the only sign it ever existed. Bait like yellowtail and slimey mackerel swarm there in summertime, however they move

around the actual mark quite quickly. In this pic we have heavily burleyed, resulting in a large school of bait appearing beneath the boat. In these circumstances sabiki rigs are often the best option because the bait school can disappear just as fast as it arrived – especially if someone nearby starts burleying heavily. Note the even soft bottom and indication of larger predators holding tight beneath the school.

## Bait grounds pics . . .

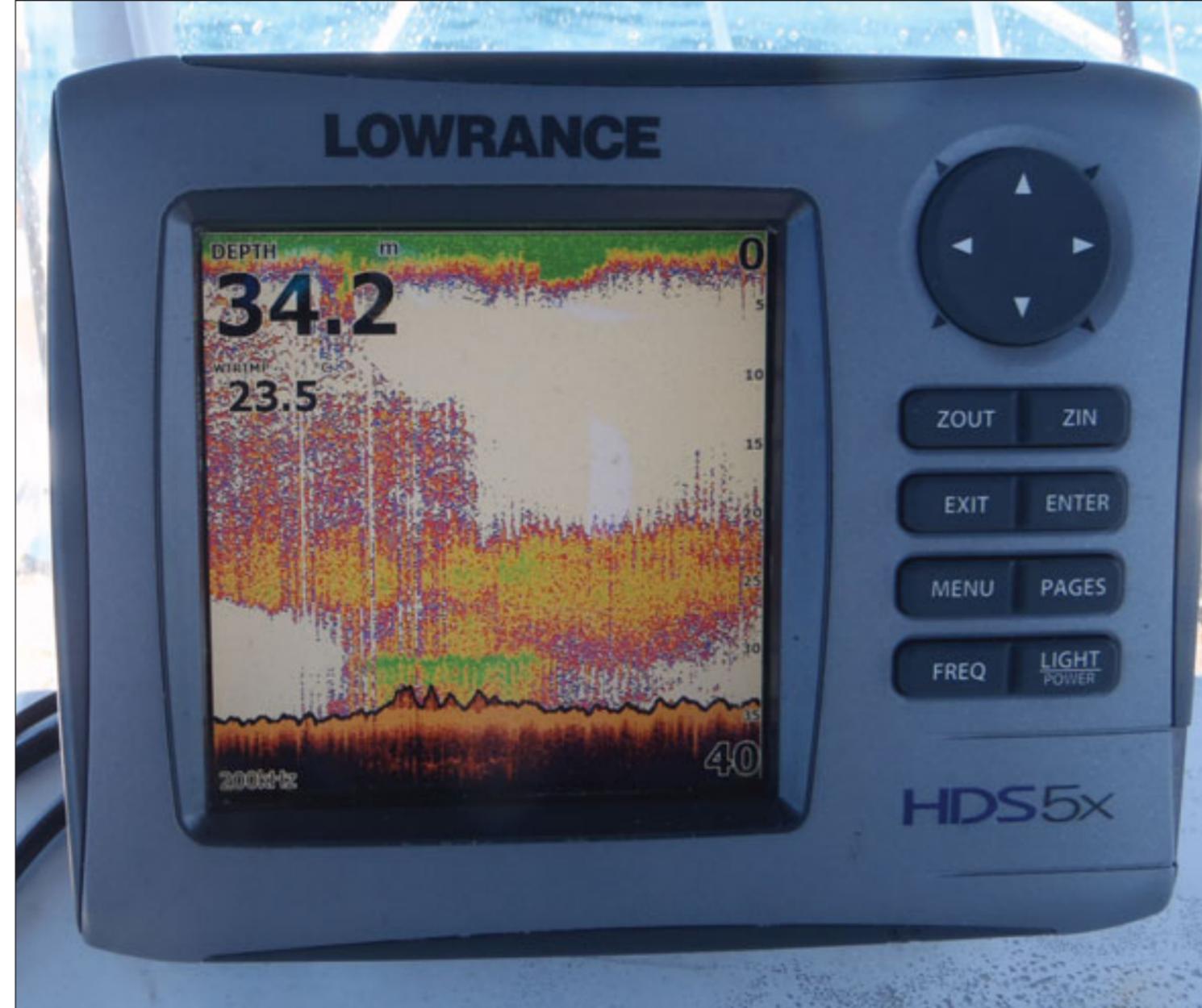
*Above:* Bait fish come in all shapes and sizes and their energy levels are different too. Slow moving fish like mardos and even yellowtail hug structure for safety, or when that's not possible assemble in large schools as a defence mechanism. High energy models like slimey mackerel – our preferred bait fish – zip in and out of the burley trail and often make only a momentary appearance on the sounder screen. The way to exploit that is to have a baited Sebeki in the strike zone at a depth matching the fish you are seeing on the screen. Colour change braid or a detachable line counter are the best way to make sure your bait is at the right depth when these speedsters appear.

**Footnote:** These clever little detachable line counters are available from the Downrigger Shop for \$15 ea, or 2 for \$25 + \$5.00 freight - PW



*Right: (on Sydney's Middle Harbour's famous "Fridge" Bait Grounds)* In this pic, you can see the actual fridge (or what's left of it) on the bottom, in 20.5 metres. A pretty amazing indication of just how important these marker points are for fish. A school of bait is holding densely packed directly over the top of the quite small (maybe 1metre high?) refrigerator remains because it's the only notable structure on an otherwise featureless bottom





## Artificial Reef, South Head

**Above:** These pics show the Artificial Reef off Sydney Harbour's South Head. Costing \$900,000 the Reef was assembled in Sydney, and lowered by barge to the ocean floor back in October 2011. Main target species are yellowtail kingfish, usually small, but excellent sport when rod, reel and line are matched to the fish size. It can also be a very good live bait spot for slimy mackerel, in summertime. In pic 1 fish can be seen marking heavily directly over the structure. The bottom shows as soft excepting for the reef itself. Water temp cool at 19 degrees C.

**Top Right:** This was taken at the height of summer and shows swarms of bait marking off to one side of the reef. After dropping multiple sabikis this proved to be a mixture of yellowtail, slimy mackerel, mados and small leatherjackets. The reef fishes better in autumn and winter and, like South Head generally, is often best on a run out tide.

**Bottom Right:** Whatever one might say about the extravagant cost of Sydney's Artificial Reef there's no doubting it's placement in October 2011 was spot on. The structure sits in around 34 metres and is swept by natural nutrients washing out of Sydney and Middle Harbour, on the run out tide. In summer, when the East Australian Current flows past, clear blue water provides perfect conditions for sight

hunters. There are several Youtube videos extant showing marlin encounters at the Artificial – pretty impressive, when we're talking 34 metres of water, outside Australia's biggest city. The elaborate structure, with way more nooks and crannies than a natural reef could ever provide, offers safety for bait fish fleeing predators. Which is why at times the screen shows more fish than water, as it does here.

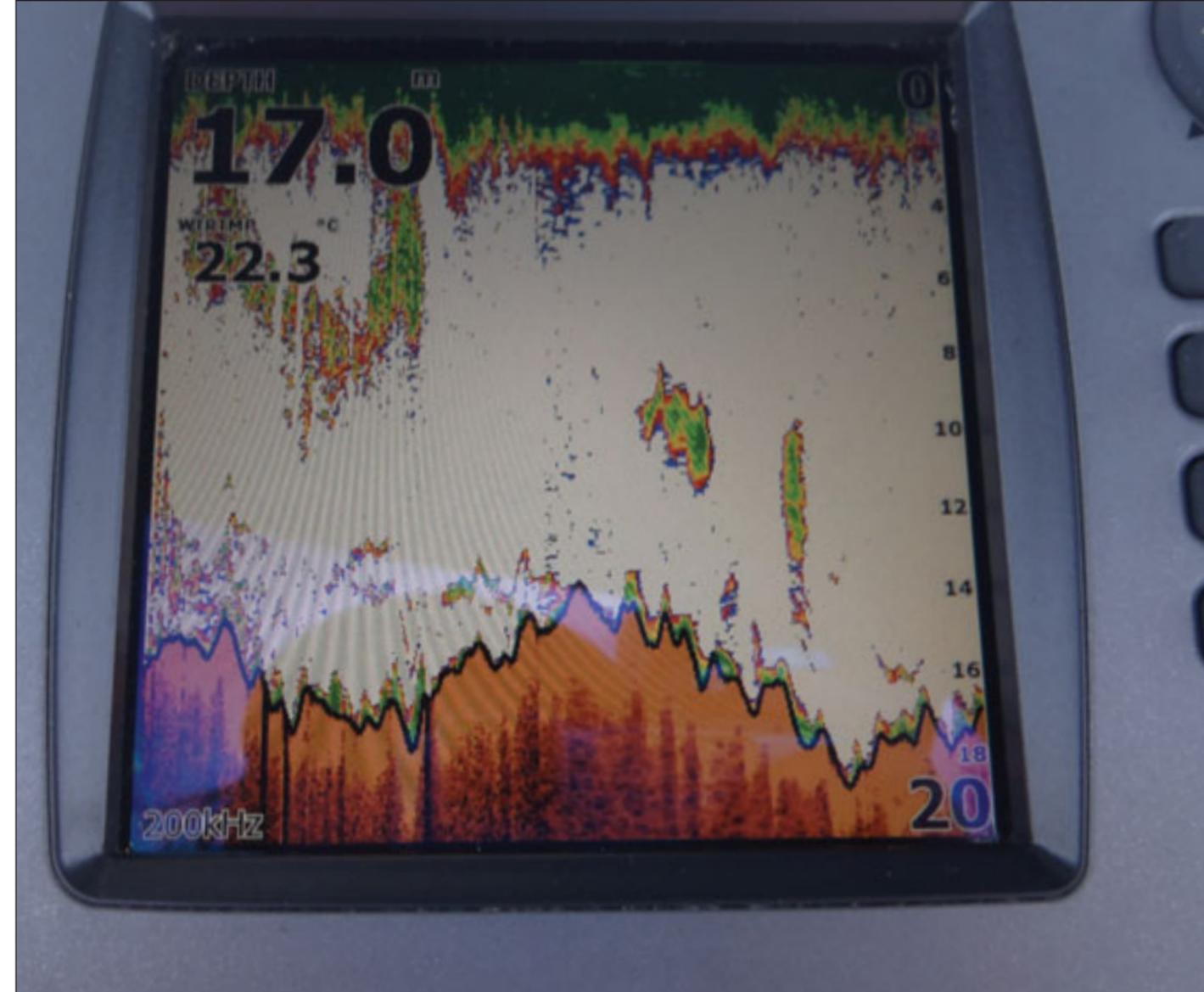




## Browns Mountain

*Above:* This pic shows the HDS 5X at Browns Mountain, a sea mount 22 nautical miles east of Sydney. The boat is drifting east off the main hump and as depth approaches 600 metres - on what was a relatively rough day, with some aeration around the transducer - is not registering a clear depth, on the top left of the screen. Fish are marking well however, with a band of gemfish around 500 metres. Broken vertical lines on the left side of the screen show minor interference from other Lowrance sounders when we were higher up on the Mountain.

*Right:* In this pic, we are in 559 metres of water, east of Browns Mountain. Upper level is set at 10 metres, lower level at 620 metres. Ping speed is slowed to 8 and the gain cranked up (almost too high.) Around 450 metres there are steady shows of fish, with another band marking in the 150-250 metre mark range. Bottom is soft, particularly on the right half of the screen. Deep marks are gemfish, mid-water marks are albacore. This pic really captures the incredible fish and squid biomass at Browns in mid-winter.



## The Wall, Long Reef

*Above:* Long Reef is about half way between Sydney Harbour and Broken Bay and has really come into its own as a kingfish fishery in recent years. A small ramp on the beach, at times badly affected by surge, permits boat launching for the competent and sometimes, the foolhardy. The reef itself is an extensive structure running perhaps a kilometre or more to the north and deepening in staggered gradients to the east. It's also surrounded by (intentionally) sunken wrecks like the Coolooli. Those are popular dive sites but also hold good numbers of kingfish and snapper and even jewfish, at times. These two pics are taken at the famous Wall, just east of the drop off. Several times this summer the current has pushed in hard from the east stacking both bait and predators in countless thousands along the edge. When that happens mid-week (meaning not too many boats on station to manage) the go is to queue on the eastern side and drift west until you hook up - which doesn't take too long. Jigs, live baits, or even the good old squid strip are deadly effective when conditions are right. One of our clients caught 80 kingfish in a day here during February 2014, almost all of course being released.

