



Catching Squid

Definitely The Prince Of Baits For Kings!

There's a lot of excitement in Sydney fishing circles these days, as it becomes increasingly apparent that the massive pre-Olympics clean-up of the iconic Sydney Harbour is producing unforeseen benefits - not least of which is the amazing re-growth of a resident population of BIG, hard hitting yellowtail kingfish. In this first instalment about the 'Kings Of The Harbour', Andrew Hestelow reckons we have to start at the beginning - and that's catching one of the kingies' favourite baits - fresh, preferably live - squid.



Live squid are arguably the fourth best bait for kingfish, behind (all live) cuttlefish, pike or garfish. But the other three are often hard to catch, let alone use.

Squid are by far the best mix of availability and productivity. I'm no expert at catching them, not by a long shot. But I know a few experts and watch their technique carefully when they're aboard my boat.

Firstly, a lot of blokes advocate high end squid jigs and sometimes, expensive egi rods and reels too. And yes, price reflects quality - just like it does in many other areas. But \$20 jigs are not for my boat, especially considering how many new chums we have aboard. The number of squid jigs we've lost in the kelp is horrible to contemplate. Which is why I rarely pay more than \$3 for a squid jig, and can be often found poking around the bargain bins at BCF, or strolling the aisles at K Mart. What we lose in quality we hopefully make up for in technique.

Our method involves the use of lights and mixing up the squid jigs with bait. Squid are attracted to light and, on a recent visit to Geelong, it was fascinating to check out the squid boats on the dock. Their superstructure is covered in powerful lights to draw squid up from the depths at night. Once that's done, they are jigged on automatic machines. The deck is of course painted black, so as not to show squid ink.

Our local Sydney Harbour squid seem to prefer rough broken ground. A mixture of rock, sand patches and kelp in one to eight metres is the go. And there's plenty of that sort of country in Sydney, especially on the north side, but there are plenty of similar bays and estuaries all over Australia, and fishos need to carefully think about where they can replicate these grounds so loved by squid concentrations - think rocks, clean sand, patches of kelp . . . that's where you'll find the squid.

As previously mentioned, they are also attracted to lights mounted on fixed structure like bridges, wharves and marinas. That may well be because those lights attract the small bait fish hunted by squid. But this gives us another opportunity, being



that we can drift over squid grounds where the depth is even and known. That reduces the likelihood of losing a jig to foul ground.

Here's the set up that works for us:

It's a paternoster, with the weight below and the lure set at a perpendicular angle above. (See pic above) In this case, weight is provided by a bait spike jig, with a pilchard. I always like drifting over the same ground with a mid-water pilchard. The reason being is that the pillies are soft, and even the pressure supplied by moderate depth will squeeze pilchard oil out into the water column. The oil is lighter than the water and will rise, providing a curtain of powerful attractant. Whether the squid themselves will pick up this attractant is uncertain. Squid expert Paul Carter says they have no sense of smell, are colour blind and cannot detect prey through their lateral line. If that's correct, and I don't dispute it, the oil will still attract and excite the bait fish which the squid are hunting.

Before we go on to method, I must mention something about the rig. Squid jigs are a nightmare to stow, especially if, as in this case, they are pre-rigged on a short 20-pound fluorocarbon leader, to enable quick changes in weight or colour. After getting some horrible tangles I now have a whole flat box devoted to pre-rigged jigs. Each one gets its own compartment. Tangle problem is solved. After use, they don't go back into the tackle box. They go into the used tackle bucket (the type used for pool chlorine) which we keep on the boat at all times. After a wash in warm soapy water, along with the rest of the gear, they go back in the tackle box. The lid is kept open, to allow the jigs - each covered by material - to dry out fully.

Our fishing method involves two light spin combos spooled with 6 kilo colour change braid, with the braid end terminating at the white mark between two changes of colour. Strip some line off the reel through the guides and make a cut at the colour

Squid are probably one of the most under-rated species recreational anglers - especially the Saturday morning angler with a boat load of kids - can target. They are a plentiful and easily renewable resource in bays and harbours all over Australia. Apart from being one of nature's preferred baits (nothing doesn't like squid!) they are a gourmet's delight as well.





change with your braid scissors. Then, tie the rig on. You now know that you have ten metres of line exactly between your terminal tackle, and the first colour change on your spool. If your rod is two metres long, you have eight metres from the rod tip. If the rod tip is two metres from the water, you have six metres in the water.

I hope this doesn't sound too complicated but I'm finding colour change braid to be an incredible fishing asset. It's not just handy for jigging. We use it to measure casting distance already. Soon, we'll check out how far various weights will cast, when used on assorted rod and reel combos at the local park. But in this case all we need to know is how deep are our jigs. Or rather, have we



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got the whole water column covered?

In our boat we run two outfits, one on each side. Each has a squid jig on top and a baited spiked jig on the bottom. In ten metres of water we will set one at 8 metres and one at 6 metres, thereby covering the best territory. Always have a third rod

Our thanks to Matty and Teresa Reid, proprietors of Raptor Fishing Charters, for the pics they've supplied for this feature. Matt is doing a great job promoting fishing charters on Sydney Harbour and pioneering a new world of very exciting sportsfishing around the yellowtail kingfish population.

ready to go with a single squid jig attached, because it is so common for a squid to follow a jig to the boat. Maybe he doesn't like the colour. Maybe he doesn't like the size. But these little critters have a pack hunting instinct that would put piranha to shame. So, if one appears following up either a hooked squid, or a jig it doesn't want to take, immediately drop the backup over.

Our rod and reel set up is a little different. For starters, we have dedicated squid rods. They are two piece and easy to stow away in the side pockets, so they don't take up valuable space in rocket launchers or rod racks. They stay on the boat.

After use, we snip off the jig and leader, and drop it in the bucket. We then remove the reel and stow it, maybe in the bucket for later cleaning too. The rod is stowed in the boat side pockets after a quick hosing. Storage problem solved.

We fish these rods parallel to the water surface. Not in your usual 45-degree gunwale rod holder. When you are drifting for squid rather than manually retrieving, it is quite common for them to swim along with the bait eating it, without hooking up. A squid eating the bait is so much easier to detect, when the rod is mounted on a 90 degree angle.

We use Roberts holders, which clamp onto the boat rails. Once the jigs are at correct depth, just keep watching the rod tips. The take is usually signalled by a slow nodding or rhythmic dipping, of the tip. When that happens, wind to load the rod, then drive the spikes home in the usual way. We always net squid, unless multiples are coming aboard simultaneously. Not just to avoid loss, but because being in the net often provokes an ink discharge. And you want that happening outside the boat, rather than inside. Flick the squid off into the bait tank or the cryovac bag, as the case may be.

Squid are an under exploited resource in Australia, and are very lightly fished both commercially and recreationally. They live for a short time, and are found everywhere from creeks and bays out to the Shelf and beyond. What you don't use for kingfish bait can be turned into a delicious meal at home.

Next Month: In the next issue, we will cover preserving squid and rigging them with both the squid slider and the brilliant Squid Frame – a new Aussie idea which makes a trolled dead squid seem alive.

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