

Jiggeryboo?

*Hey, it's not
black magic -
just hard work!*

There's no doubt jigging - especially for the mighty kingfish - is undergoing an astonishing renaissance, as more anglers discover the effectiveness of this age-old technique. But armed with today's high tech line, reels and parabolic rods, there's no doubt there's a jigging system coming into your boat very soon. However, as one of Australia's leading jigging experts, exceptional fisho and tackle importer Andrew Hestelow explains, jigging is not for the faint of heart . . . the basics haven't really changed - the technique only really works if you know how to give 'em plenty!

*Kerri Wilson with a solid king
from 12 Mile Reef*

Jigging - Not Black Magic - Just Hard Work!

Hat Head! A name to inspire excitement in any red-blooded angler's heart. The Hat is renowned as the closest point to the continental shelf on the east coast of Australia.

Any large predatory fish riding the East Australian Current southbound has to pass around the tip of Hat Head.

Which is why, in the late 1970s, my mate Ken and I would fish the place whenever we could.

Wide of the tip and on a north-south line is a steep sandbank carved by the current. It's quite spectacular when viewed snorkelling, and appears as a giant version of the drop off in a sandy creek. Big Spanish mackerel hunt the point in the early morning, and lie on the edge of this drop off when the sun rises high in the sky. It took a couple of years but eventually we learned how

to target them successfully.

These were the days of long forgiving rods and the Seascope 621 overhead reel. Made in Newcastle at Wallsend Engineering, with brass gears, the Seascope was not a tough reel by today's circumstances. But it could cast a three or four ounce lure out of sight and there was nothing else like it at the time, for retrieve rate. The lure of choice was a classic which I haven't seen for years, the Hopkins No Equal. A standard chromed piece of brass, in a rough bait fish shape. But the dimples on its side caught and reflected light well. That drove the mackerel insane.

The technique was to cast the lure out as far as possible and let it sink all the way to the sandy bottom, hopefully being viewed on descent by Spanish eyes. Wind the line to take out the belly, pointing the rod tip towards the lure so there was no slack whatsoever. As hard and as fast as you could lift the rod tip, drop and wind, lift again, drop and wind. The hit would usually

come on the second or third lift, as the lure flashed upwards through the water. Some mighty battles eventuated with many of the mackerel going southwards around the point, and being cut off. Somewhere here is the only pic I have of those days, a 25-pounder.

We didn't know it at the time, but what we were doing was jigging. That is, dropping a lure to where fish were known to be holding, and ripping it almost vertically through the water column to imitate a fleeing bait fish or squid. By the early 1980s the method was starting to take off in Sydney and we would spend most Sundays, weather permitting, at the North Peak, some seven miles off Maroubra.

The kingfish would mark clearly on our Fuso paper sounder and we would drop jigs to them in much the same way we do now. The jigs were of course way different, most popular being the Iron range. These had one flat side and one curved side, meaning they would flutter down. It was

common to get hits on the drop but also just as common to have your treble hook straightened. Having said that, 7 foot fibreglass rods and Senator 4/0s spooled with monofilament were very forgiving of mistakes, and we lost nowhere near as many kingfish then as we do now.

We then went into a long hiatus due to the infamous floating kingfish traps. Through the 1990s stock of this prime commercial recreational species was depleted, by commercial greed. Following the ban numbers steadily started to rebuild and are still building. Offshore reefs like Mowarry at Eden, Montague Island, the Banks at Jervis Bay and Twelve Mile off Sydney produce thousands of kingfish every year for trailer boat anglers. Through winter, we fish for them once a week, and while by no means an expert I thought some of what we've learnt might be of interest.

Firstly, the gear.

My views on this are different to a lot

of other writers and indeed, even some of our own clients! Fishing regularly with a wide range of keen anglers I get to see a big cross section of tackle on the boat. The problem I've seen time and again is the use of too-heavy gear. Let's face it – most blokes aren't fit enough to repeatedly bring a 300 gram jig up from 100 to 150 metres fast, using the 1.5 kilo combos so often recommended in the stores. I know I'm not. But endurance is often what's required to deliver success.

So get an outfit you're comfortable with. Forget using 80-pound line and matching heavy rods and reels when jigging off the east coast – except in very special cases. Save those combos for your New Zealand trip. Kingfish fight straight up and down, over the deep reefs. And the reefs themselves are not bare rock – they're covered in soft spongy coral, several inches thick. We've broken chunks of it off and wound them to the surface several times, by way of proof. The idea that kingfish will rub the jig off on

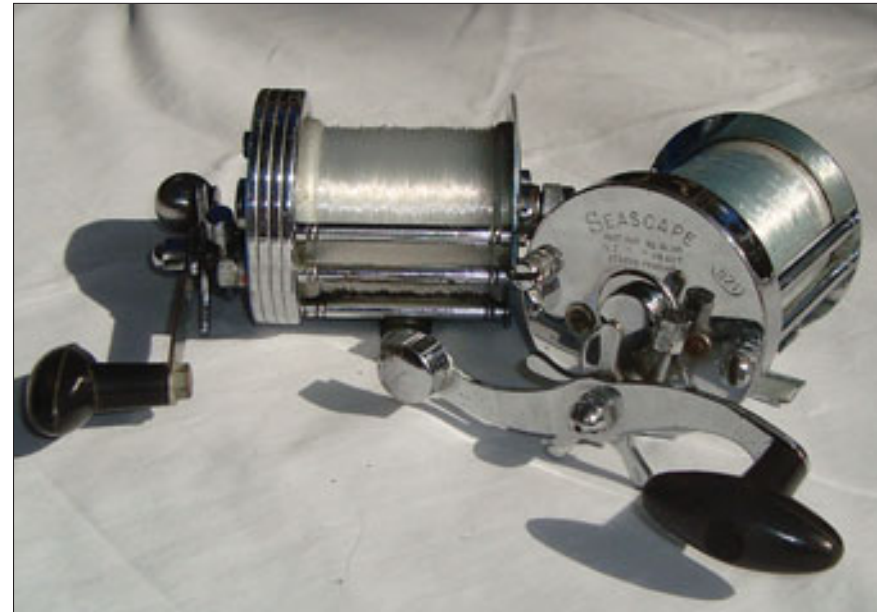
jagged reefs doesn't hold true, in deep water. Over the shallow reefs they'll ping you in a heartbeat, but that's a different story.

Forget getting done on the offshore reefs. A far more common cause of lost fish is short heavy rods (like the JigWrex 555), heavy drag settings and heavy braid. With this kind of setup there's nowhere for the shock to be absorbed. Get yourself a quality midsize spinning reel around the 4500 to 6000 size, and spool it with 50-pound braid. Overhead reels are an excellent option and will always be better for fighting simply because the line doesn't have to travel through a right angle between reel and first guide. But spinning reels often have more flexibility. Your jigging rod should be between 5 feet 6 inches and 6 feet, with a long butt that brings the centre of gravity back, towards your armpit. I like a full parabolic blank that bends right through the foregrip which by the way should be thick Hypalon, to fill the hand. All up, the combo should weigh well under one kilo.

Terminal tackle.

TV and magazine articles on jigging show flat seas, warm weather, and big kingfish coming aboard with monotonous regularity. That sometimes happens but way more likely is a cold westerly, a trailer boat bouncing around in the chop, and face full of icy salt water with frozen fingers. Offshore in a small boat is not the place to be tying the PR knot - or anything, requiring a bobbin. Plus it's not just kingfish, on the hundred metre reefs. Barracouta, bonito, and the dreaded leatherjacket are very commonly encountered. All of these have sharp teeth and often damage or slice through your leader. Especially leatherjackets, which have been in plague numbers for the last two years, and have a bite like pinking shears. When they're around, multiple bite-offs are possible, meaning constant replacement of your jig and leader is required – since the LJs can bite you off well above the leader to main line knot.

What works for me is to prerig jigs on crimped leaders at home, before departure. 1.5 metres of 80-pound monofilament crimped at the jig end to the welded ring, and at the other end to a small brass ring. I never use more than one hook per jig. That's a recipe



Ah, there's some lovely history here - check out the very young Andrew Hestelov with his first big mackerel - and yes, that's him dancing on the rocks at Hat Head in, er, (then)! Also note one for we older folk (memories!) of the wonderful Aussie-made Seascope - if you didn't get the mother of all bird's nests, you could easily cast across to New Zealand . . . plus an assortment of old jigging 'irons' and the infamous 'No Equal' (above) jig that caught just about anything.





If you want to lock horns (and shoulder and back muscles) with some kingfish in the serious heavy weight division, you might like to think about a trip across to visit your Kiwi relatives - that's where you'll find the really big 'uns!



Eddie Aspden off Sydney with a typical king that is a borderline keeper - but crikey, you wouldn't know that on a per kilo : fight basis, that's for sure.

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for injury, as a hooked kingfish thrashes wildly on the deck. Anyone who's been to hospital to have a hook cut out doesn't want to see it happen again. When the jig is bitten off, the leader is damaged or the braid cut through, just tie the end of the line onto the brass ring of a new rigged jig and you're back in business. The leader is coiled for neatness and secured with a small piece of garden tie, then put in a jig bag ready for use. I've seen someone get seasick trying to tie a PR knot on a small boat offshore. Just forget it, there's easier ways, and the key is to get your jig back down into the strike zone as quickly as possible.

Jig colours and sizes.

Now this is a curly one. I used to scoff at the idea that, in the submarine gloom fifty fathoms down, kingfish could discriminate between colours of jigs which were flashing past their eyes at a huge rate of knots. And of course, I was dead wrong. They definitely have preferences. We have done side-by-side colour testing and come up with some interesting results. In New Zealand, we found the kings definitely preferred green over cream colour mackerel pattern jigs. Off Sydney, we proved albacore by far prefer a white or silver jig, with kingfish favouring – but not dramatically – a jig with either a red back, or red belly.

Right. The rod and reel is sorted, you're marking kings on the sounder, and it's time to drop a jig. In most cases, drift caused by either current or wind must be dealt with. If the chop's not too heavy the simplest and most effective way is to reverse the boat into the current. Drop your jig and let it sink as fast as possible. Holding the rod vertically can reduce friction from the guides. If you're dropping to

fish at a known midwater depth, you'll be counting the colour changes every ten metres. When your jig is at the correct depth, close the bail arm or engage the spool, if using an overhead reel. Drop the rod tip to the four o'clock position, bringing the reel handle to the six o'clock position. Lift the rod tip to the one o'clock position, and bring the reel handle to the twelve o'clock position. Repeat. You are now jigging, and the more you do it the smoother and more comfortable your action will

get. For some blokes it can be hard to get the rhythm going, akin to rubbing your stomach and patting your head at the same time. If you're in that category, send me an email. I'll forward pics of a contraption we assembled, the Jigging Machine. A modified retractable garden hose winder, you replace the hose with nylon cord and attach your line straight off the rod tip. It simulates jigging quite accurately and we've found it helps newbies perfect their action quickly.

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Jigging Combo

ROD: five feet six, underbound guides, Fuji tip, rated to 24-kilo line.

REEL: DAIWA Exceler 4500T. 6BB + 1 roller bearing, max drag 9 kilos, spooled with 190m 24-kilo colour change braid.

WEIGHT: 590 grams **GEAR RATIO:** 4.7:1

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So you're over the reef and marking hard ground 110 metres down. Just off the bottom there's a smattering of small fish, nannygai and pinkies. At 85 metres there's a bunch of irregular blue blobs. Down go the jigs, you count nine colours, close the bail arm and you're jigging. Four full turns of the handle and your rod tip slams down.

You're on! And listening to one of the best sounds in fishing – braid line, going across the guides under heavy load. What happens next depends on the species you're targeting.

Kingfish will fight vertically, and are so conditioned to powering against the direction of pull they can actually be steered, by rod movement.

Albacore will fight in standard tuna mode, powerful runs with plenty of sharp tail beats. Spanish mackerel will deliver a fast horizontal run then some head shaking, followed by the

On a kilo for kilo basis, there's not much doubt kingfish are one of the hardest fighting fish in our world - and they just don't know how to give up, either. Without really good tackle - and a smooooth drag system, you'll rarely get them topside.

secondary run. Soon after they can be steadily brought to the boat.

Blue-eye cod, gemfish and other species jigged at 400 metres or deeper require some extra preparation.

A correctly fitted rod bucket and kidney harness is essential if you are not going to exhaust yourself. If using a spinning reel, get a drop strap and fit it to the rod foregrip just in front of the reel foot. Connect the ring on the drop strap to the two clips on the kidney harness. That will keep you as comfortable as possible when bringing a deep water oogie to the surface.

From the list above kingfish are the only dirty fighters. The power of a big one is unbelievable although nothing that can't be managed, with the right gear and attitude.

Avoid progressive or too stiff rods, and stick to full parabolic rods where you can feel the blank flexing through the foregrip. The focus must always be on absorbing the shock. Don't worry too much about the kingfish rubbing you off on the reef – in the south-east corner of Australia, anyway.

Reefs over 80 metres deep are covered in soft corals and the main threat to getting your fish on board is no shock absorption, between kingfish and angler. Don't rush it. Let the fish tire itself out against the rod and the

drag. It really is crazy to see the way quite small kings are cranked to the boat on 80-pound braid these days, with anglers posting Youtube videos of fish boatside dousing the crew with salt spray.

Why not enjoy the fight?

If netting a good fish, don't use the net handle like a crowbar. Once the fish is inside the net, raise the handle vertically, not horizontally. If gaffing, make sure the gaff man understands that the point must go behind the leader. Not in front of the leader. No wild swipes, just a nice clean lift in the front half of the fish. Avoid letting your fish drum itself on the deck, thrashing around with the jig slamming into the boat coamings and bruising the flesh. That will substantially reduce eating qualities. All table fish benefit from being dropped onto a shock-absorbing neoprene chiller bag, being quickly bled and put straight into an ice slurry.

And that's jigging. Challenging, great exercise, exciting but most importantly, a really effective way to catch fish. Get out there and into it because with the resurgence in kingfish numbers on the east coast, samson fish on the west coast, and albacore in Victoria, it's only going to get better.

TBM

