Braving the cold pays off
Shane Lowery | July 2015 » Regular Features / Spearfishing /

July is the coldest month of the year for Spearfishers with temps in Port Phillip Bay and surrounds as well as on the far South West coast collectively dropping to 12 (or less) degrees.

For those that are keen and willing to brave the cold though there is some exceptional diving on offer. Through the preceding months there seems to have been one thing on the minds of the avid bluewater diver and that has been tuna. Most of the hunting has been based out of Port Fairy with school sized fish bin close since early February and showing no signs of moving out wide. Anglers have found these fish to be quite finicky due to the fact that they are feeding on very small bait fish making it difficult to "match the hatch" with traditional skirts and divers.

Conversely this has worked in the favour of spearfishers because the bait balls have been close to shore in around the 30-40m of water. When bird activity gives the tell tale sign and fish are found busting on bait it's been a simple matter of introducing burley such as cubed pilchards to hold the fish in one spot. Finding the fish is one thing but spearing them is a whole other skill set. As stated in previous reports focusing on a single bait cube and leading the shot as a fish enters peripheral vision is the key, but the timing required to land a shot is something that comes with practice and experience. Shipwreck Coast Skindivers inc (Port Fairy based club) have had several very successful trips on the tuna this season and more trips are certainly in the planning throughout July, including trips to the shelf to target albacore tuna.

There are also many opportunities to target inshore species in July and winter offers some of the most stable weather patterns and best seas. Shallower reef areas are the prime hunting grounds for sea sweep, long and short fin pike, silver trevally, trumpeter, southern rock lobster, King George whiting and abalone just to name a few. It's important to be aware that female rock lobster are in their closed season starting from June 1, but males are still open through July. This is also the peak period for Australian salmon and you never know what you might bump into even in the colder weather. On a recent dive Nathan "Watto" Watson speared a rat kingfish and sighted a large school of kings in the 12+ kg size range at the back of Julia Percy Island. Certainly a rare occurrence this late in the season.

At this time of year a minimum 5mm two-piece wetsuit is a must, and it's also a good idea to limit dives to 2-4 hours. Always dive with a buddy and look out for each other's safety. When diving offshore it's particularly important to be aware of your surroundings and as always make sure you are flying a diver below flag or a clearly visible float towed by each diver.

Enjoy your diving in July as it's a terrific month to be in the water and remember to stay safe.

Images

Brett Illinworth from Esclapez with some winter crayfish.
Nathan Watson with a rat kingfish speared on the southwest coast.

Bree Fox and some nice sweep and winter lobster.