

HAIRTAIL



“Chromed plated dynamite”

One of the prettiest sights to be had in fishing is seeing the sheer beauty of the Hairtail as it emerges from the cool depths into the view of the angler.

This long, sleek, flat-bodied animal is a real treat to see as its bluish green chrome plated frame slices through the water displaying its almost transparent fins and shapely whip like tail. However that's where the beauty ends as one look into its evil open mouth and the sight of the sabre type, needle sharp teeth is ample to knock caution into the bravest of anglers.

It's a bit hard to understand the habits of the Hairtail, as even though they are a highly social type species that form into huge schools, it would appear that they are not always that fond of each other, turn into cannibals at the blink of the eye, and chew huge chunks out of each other.

When Hairtail are at peace and not biting the crap out of each other, they have a true love of small live yellowtail, silver biddy's, garfish, fresh fish strips of mullet, mackerel, tuna and tailor as well as whitebait and W.A. pilchards. Crustaceans and shellfish also form part of the diet.

When on the move they will swim in the horizontal, whilst, when stopping for lunch, they appear to favor eating in the vertical position.

Although specimens around 2 metres and 5.5kg can be had, you'll find their more common around 1.5m and 2kg. Although taken by trawlers in our off-shore waters it appears they have a tendency to favor the deeper holes when entering the rivers, bays, harbours and estuaries of the region.

Unfortunately, very little research has been carried out on the hairtail and the thoughts in this article are based on the observations of amateur anglers. They are known to have visited parts of Australia from far north Queensland around to W.A., but only a few spots between Newcastle and Port Kembla can, in the main, be relied upon to produce the goods on a regular basis.

In the Hawkesbury River system the strong preference is to fish the high tide from around dusk and through to mid morning, while at Botany Bay huge hauls have been taken in daylight hours and at all times of the tide.

The general consensus of opinion is that the deep cool water is a must and locating the depth they are feeding at is of the utmost importance. As a rough rule of thumb they will be feeding anywhere from 1.2m from the bottom through to the mid water mark, however, they have been taken at the surface with a lure in the daylight hours.

In the frequently visited haunts of hairtail such as Coal and Candle Creek etc, hairtail can be taken all year round, but are definitely at their peak from late February to August approx. Unfortunately a boat is pretty

much a necessity if you're after hairtail.

Fishing with either a hand line or rod and reel are both acceptable practices.

HOW TO CATCH HAIRTAIL.

Anchor boat in selected spot. Lower bait into water and either let bait sink to the bottom and slowly retrieve until a bite is felt, or slowly lower the bait until it hits bottom and retrieve line at a rate of 1.5m at various intervals until a bite is felt and their feeding depth is indicated. Once correct depth is found, a piece of wool can be tied to the mainline at a point that will let you know when you have reached the productive depth when the bait goes back down.

Usually the first indication of a hairtail is a gentle tugging of the line as the fish mouths the bait. It is of the utmost importance to retain your composure and not strike at this first hint. Have your drag set to under the lines breaking strain and take your choice of either of the following procedures: a.) Play out another 1 to 2 metres of mainline to the fish or b.) Jig the bait up and down or c.) Do nothing and wait until the fish gets fair dinkum. This generally happens within a minute or two of the first encounter and generally comes in the form of a more prolonged and powerful pulling down of the mono mainline. At this stage strike in a firm flowing fashion, set the hook and start the fight. Keep a tight line and ride the resistance. Honestly, the bigger ones can pull so hard you may feel your bum's going to rise up and get dragged through your fingertips.

At other times such is the fighting power of the fish,

HAIRTAIL

you might start thinking it is taking you to a snag. The trick is to stay calm and ride out the initial resistance. Don't be too concerned with reeling it in at this stage. Keep pressure on the fish and gradually it will tire. Retrieve line in a firm controlled manner as it becomes available. At no time should any slack line be allowed. If given the leeway of a little slack line, hairtail readily take the opportunity to dislodge the hook and spit it straight back at you. They are the Harry Houdinis of the marine world.

Although a bit frightening when you spot the teeth we suggest a good way to land hairtail is to retrieve the mono mainline until the wire trace is in comfortable reach. Using a gloved hand get a good grip of the wire trace as far away from the teeth as possible. Using an old cloth such as an old T-shirt grip the fish firmly behind the head and gills. Take

care to avoid the sharp spikes around the gills. Once you have a firm grip of the fish and have it under your control, lift it into the boat taking care that the tail is clear of all objects it could gain purchase on. At this stage a "Donger" is real bloody handy. A donger on my boat is a piece of 20mm steel pipe 300mm long. Gently lift the donger until it is in the vicinity of the hairtails head, in one, two or three quick moves belt the crap out of the back of the fishes head. This seems to have a calming, relaxing effect on the fish and in most cases it's now safe to handle and store. If you are into catch and release don't use the donger.

Due to a lack of a large icebox on my boat, we keep them between two wet corn bags or an old wet blanket until ready to clean.

Most hairtail diehards would agree that a berley would

assist in getting them on the hop. Used sparingly a berley of chopped up stale pilchards, bread, fish heads or frames can be the difference between feast or famine.

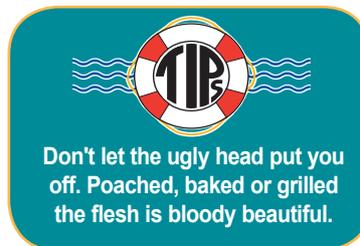
If you find they have suddenly gone off the bite, remain patient. Popular belief is that this species move in a circle when feeding in the deep holes. Hang in there for a while, have a cuppa or a beer and wait for them to make their way back to you.

WHERE TO CATCH HAIRTAIL

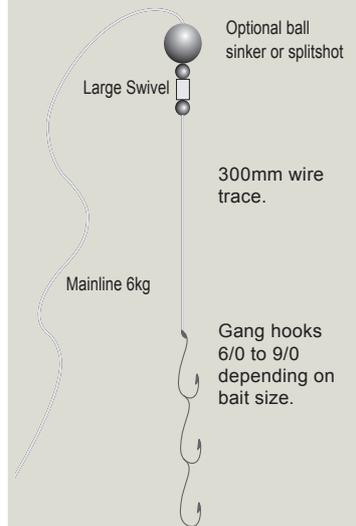
ESTUARIES

Refer to Map downloads.

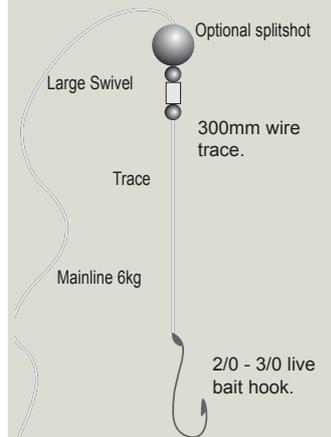
HAIRTAIL = H



DEAD BAIT RIG



LIVE BAIT RIG



BAIT: Small live yellowtail, silver biddy's, garfish, fresh fish strips of mullet, mackerel, tuna and tailor. W.A. pilchards, whitebait.

Tucka Time!



Orange & Lemon Hairtail Fillets With Asparagus

Ingredients

800g skinless fillets
1x 225g tin asparagus
300ml white wine

Sauce: 2 tbsp butter
1/2 cup milk
1/8 cup lemon juice

1/8 cup orange juice
Salt & pepper
to taste

Method

Arrange fillets in layers in a lightly greased ovenproof dish. Pour wine over. Bake for 20min approx in oven heated to 175c. fish is cooked when it flakes. Reserve poaching liquid. Transfer fillets to a serving plate and keep warm. Simmer asparagus in can juices until hot, drain, spread over fillets. Meanwhile, melt butter in a saucepan. Add flour and stir to a paste. Gradually add the milk, orange and lemon juice a little at a time while stirring all the time until a smooth consistency is reached. Slowly add reserved poaching liquid, stirring all the time and bring to the boil, reduce heat and simmer until sauce reduces and thickens. Add salt and pepper to taste. Pour over fish fillets; serve immediately with mashed potatoes, boiled carrots and fresh beans. Serves 4.



Rigs shown are for rod and reel. Increase mainline to 10kg plus for hand lines. The heavier mainline mono is easier to grasp and will not cut into the hands as easily. Rubber finger guards will help with keeping your hands cut free from mono mainline.