

## ***Welcome to Tournament Fishing- Rules in Review- By Gary Fooks***

***“Why not fish one of the bream tournaments?” suggested the woman at the Fishing Monthly booth. I stalled, speechless. Was she insane? Me enter a tournament?***

I was about to tell her I wasn't the tournament type when I thought: well, why not? Enter as a non-boater and would get two days on the water with a different, experienced angler each day and see how it's done. Certainly a lot cheaper than hiring a guide!

As a beginner I had been throwing out bait and not knowing what I might catch. By not focussing on any species, I caught very little. As Grandpa said, “Sit on the fence and all you will get is splinters – and where it hurts!”

It was time for me to take my fishing to the next level.

### **What's in it for You**

Focussing on bream, and learning from a more experienced fisher made a lot of sense. Others come to ABT with a lot more experience. Every year a gun bait fisher comes across to show these lure guys how it's done – and they usually do!

Whatever your level of experience, an ABT tournament is a place to learn and learn quickly. No single technique, lure or plastic lasts long at the top, before some new idea takes over. All you have to do is listen, learn and try someone else's technique until you get it working. The smarter tournament boat owners generally come along as a non-boater for the first comp or two. That's the best way to get the hang of it all – in someone else's boat.

Before I entered my first BASS tournament I had never even seen a bass, let alone caught one. That first weekend I caught a few nice yellowbelly but no bass... and had one of the best weekends of my fishing life. Two years later I qualified for the BASS Electric Convention! It just goes to show how quickly you can pick things up.

### **Getting in on the Action**

Getting started is easy. First, you need to become an ABT member, which will make you eligible for any event. The application form is at the back of this *Tournament Guide* next to the nomination form for tournaments. To guarantee entry, nominate early – at least four weeks before the event.

The other way to make sure you don't miss out is to get together with a boater and send both entries in the same envelope. You won't be fishing together, but you will both be guaranteed a start.

To find out the latest news concerning an upcoming tournament, visit the *QFM* chat board at [www.fishingmonthly.com.au](http://www.fishingmonthly.com.au). The regulars meet there to arrange lifts and share accommodation.

### **First Day**

So now it's finally the weekend of the tournament. Like me you will have brought way too many plastics and five varieties of scent that you'll never use!

I like to get to the Friday night briefing at about 8pm. It's a good chance to meet people and ask a few questions. Admitting that you're new at this usually prompts four or five people to try to help you out with advice.

Come 8:30pm and it's the official briefing: a few warnings, some clarification of local boundaries and then they start the roll call. It's a very slick operation so stay alert!

The official briefing is where you meet your foursome: your boaters for each of the next two days and your opposite non-boater. I have pen and paper to swap mobile phone numbers and plan where to meet my boater in the morning. While the boater is the host and should look after his guest, the non-boater should be a great guest, and a team player. I usually start by asking what type of boat he has, where he wants to meet, and how much gear and how many rods would be ok? Two or three has never been an issue. He'll be there early to launch his boat with the other 70 boats in field so ask if he needs a hand in the morning.

While I have a fat tackle bag full of really important gear (most of which I never actually use), a few things like basic first aid, sunscreen and insect repellent are good to share with your host. In a small fabric esky I bring sandwiches, fruit, snacks and drinks for two. I've never fished a really cold competition but a thermos could be a good idea.

He's done all the work to get the boat ready, so it's good teamwork to prepare some food for two. Of course, anything in my tackle bag is his to use and it's more often than not vice versa. In every event it's been a case of whatever plastic is working ... we share!

### **Rise and Shine**

If I am there early enough, I help launch the boat and maybe park his car. At the 'check out' in the morning it's my job to open up the livewells for inspection, close them and take the numbered key tag. The boater is usually very protective of this tag because if it's lost on the boat we could be declared late and get penalized. My solution is to bring a supply of velcro cable ties to attach the key tag to a spot near the console.

That way the key is safe and visible, and the boater seems more relaxed than if it's in my pocket. The teamwork and friendship doesn't end there. Little things are a big help: lending a hand to drop or retrieve the electric motor, filling the livewell as he brings in the first fish of the day,

holding the landing net for each other and helping to retrieve snagged lures. Nothing surprising – just the things you would do if you were out with your best mate.

### **Safe and Sound**

In the same way be a genuine buddy and mention when rules are being broken, like six knots under bridges, wearing a PFD or attaching the engine cut out lanyard. These rule breaches can get you both disqualified. It doesn't take much. I was out once with a past national champion and we were in a rush, and almost on the plane when all I had to say was 'lanyard' and he quickly fixed it and thanked me later.

Non-boaters always need to bring their own PFD. I have one of those inflatable ones and I just keep it on all day. The boater may have a spare – but you can bet it's an uncomfortable old block. Competitors must wear a PFD at all times when on the plane, though in Victoria the state rules say at all times when underway – and that includes drifting with the electric.

At the Gold Coast, I first had a full bag of five fish. Between us we had a full score of 10 bream in the livewell. My greatest memory is seeing my boater over the moon to have 10 fish on his boat. Here he was, a past national finalist, genuinely thrilled with my five tiny bream to add to his five beauties. It's moments like that, that makes ABT a great tournament.

### **Bagging Out**

Once an angler has the quota (five bream, two bass), his/her fishing must stop as soon as the next fish is caught, and the smallest released. This sorting takes some time and is often when the non-boater is invited to take over the boat and can get in some primary casts. If you are not comfortable with an electric, at least be the safety eyes of the boater and keep a look out.

### **No, After You**

It's usually good form to let your boater have the first cast at a new piece of structure, but if he is delayed he will usually invite you to first. More often than not there are more than two good casts – so let him go first and just pick the second.

I have caught plenty of fish on what some may have seen as the secondary target, when the most promising looking pontoon produced nothing. It's not the same with other boats, they must keep a cast 30m away. If you find yourself too close then at least don't cast in their direction.

### **Mum's the Word**

Often, when a boater takes you to a spot with fish, he will get protective. It's his secret spot and he doesn't want you telling your other boater the next day. Sometimes I have my doubts about

this one because few spots are truly secret, but I'm not willing to risk it and break this unwritten rule.

### **Pitching In**

In the end you can make some great mates, but just remember it's their boat, their pride and joy and it cost them a fortune. Be a mate and tidy up the cans and tackle on the floor. When he gets home there's a few hours work to wash it all down so the best you can do is give him a head start. And you'd be a real mug if you didn't help retrieve the boat – backing the trailer or running the boat up to the trailer.

The most sensitive unwritten rule is to offer some money as a share of the petrol costs of the day. Given the way petrol prices are rising, I'm reluctant to say what you should offer, but until recently \$20 seemed to go down ok. Again, it's the same as going out with a mate. Break the ice at the start of the day by putting your hand in your pocket early. Don't be surprised or offended if they refuse, most do, but I try to leave these with some favourite plastics.

### **Phone Home**

Another rule is that you don't use radios or mobile phones during the tournament. They spoil the quiet day and it's also a rule that stops cheating. Imagine mates or even paid spotters whose job is to find fish and radio to the main competitor. On small lakes my 14 year-old son has fished alone in BASS Electric Tournaments and for added safety he takes a handheld VHF, with another handset onshore. The Tournament Director always gives us the nod and lets us bend the no radio rule for a genuine safety reason.

### **Crossing the Line**

I've left the hardest part till the end. What if someone breaks a sporting or safety rule? Before the tournament download the latest version of the tournament rules and stuff a copy in your tackle bag. Basically any breach of boating regulations is a breach of tournament rules, like exceeding six knots near moored vessels, or when travelling under a bridge (NSW).

Then there are tournament rules about no trolling, out of bounds, holding more than five bream (two bass) and using bait. One of the reasons for random draws is to discourage cheating and to make our tournaments as sporting as golf. So there will be times when you have to do the right thing and have a quiet chat to the Tournament Director.

My suggestion is that you do that as soon as possible – preferably before the weigh-in. It's all for the good of our sport in the long run.

**Fact Box**

*Sign me Up!*

Membership and tournament entry forms, are available from the following locations:

Tournament Angler Guide

[www.bream.com.au](http://www.bream.com.au)

[www.australianbass.com.au](http://www.australianbass.com.au)

A full version of the rules for each series are available for download from the websites.