

Competition Kingfish

Carl Muir from Epic Adventures in Tairua shares a few secrets for targeting big kingfish out of Tairua, and puts it into practice in the recent Tairua Stand Up competition.

CARL Muir from Epic Adventures in Tairua shares a few secrets for targeting big kingfish out of Tairua that he put into practice in the recent Tairua Stand Up competition.

One fish in New Zealand waters stands out from all the rest - majestically coloured green, gold and silver and aptly named the KING of all FISH.

No matter how many you've caught they'll still blow you away with their sheer power for their size. They'll have you buckled over the side of the boat cursing as a screaming spool burns your thumb and instinctively they know the best way to bust you off if you're not on your game.

Kings, kingis or kingfish, whatever you call them in your neck of the woods, chances are the coastline you fish holds good sized kingis at some stage during the year (even as far south as Crusader country I hear!). And as far as the kitchen goes, I'd rate them as one of the best eating fish we have in New Zealand.

Fighting factor, accessibility and eating quality - they have it all, making the kingfish our number one sportfish.

WHERE TO FISH

As far as places to hook into a kingfish go, you can't go past Tairua on the Eastern Coromandel. Within half an hour from the Paku wharf is all the likely terrain to hold kingfish at various times of the year, from the harbour to shallow coastline, inshore reefs around Slipper Island and Shoe, to the blue water islands and offshore pinnacles at the Aldermen Islands and Castle Rock.

The key to finding where the kingfish are at any particular time is BAIT - kingi's grow so quickly and have so much sheer power for good reason, they eat a LOT!

For those who are lucky enough to dive as well as fish (a great way to get an insight into where the fish are), any of the spots out from Tairua and Slipper Island are where big schools of jack mackerel are holding will be the likely spots to target kingis from November through to June along the Tairua coastline. April and May in particular see some of the biggest fish in close at these spots.

Every spot seems to have its hot time of the day or tide and big kings seem to have a 'beat' they cover through the day as they hunt up and down the coastline, or a round a patch of reef, harassing baitfish along the way.

The Aldermen Islands and specifically the pins on the outside of the volcanic group hold the biggest fish and they are generally there year round. Any large spikes which



drop into deep water and hold a lot of bait fish are likely to also hold good sized kingis. Most of the pins hold big schools of trevally and pink maomao and while you don't tend to think of them as typical kingfish feed, I've found both inside big kings. Funnily enough the two jigs that seem to work very best are a large green/gold and med sized pink, that resemble both fish.

WHEN TO FISH

For the best, most visually exciting fishing for kingfish, early morning is without doubt the best time to target them around the shallow coastline, reefs and bays. Bait fish, like mackerel, are near the surface in ones and twos first thing in the morning making them targets for the 'Jerry Collins of the sea'. Kingi's cruise around the surface crash tackling anything that looks like easy prey!

The best strategy at that time of day is fishing live mackerel on the surface under balloons. Load up on as many livies as possible before the kingis come in though, they'll be damn hard to catch once the kingi's start crashing around the boat! You'll find that if you're on the water in the twilight of dawn you'll have baitfish congregating all around the boat and that creates a massive ball of bait to draw the kingfish in when they start hunting first thing in the morning.

Other hot times are slack tide and moonrise or set. Get all three lined up together and you will be in for some dynamite fishing - as we found out three weeks ago! Fishing with me was Ron Wilson from Hamilton. Ron had been dying to catch his first ever 'decent kingi' and spotting a good window where all of the variables lined up, I suggested Ron meet me at Tairua to nab that elusive bruiser.

Ron couldn't get there first thing so I dashed

out early in the eerie haze of dawn to the reef we were going to fish and loaded up on live-baits. After picking up Ron back in the harbour at 7.15am we returned to the reef with all three kingi rods rigged up with balloons and livebaits ready to go, but only one ever made it into the water that morning!

The first livey got wolfed within seconds of hitting the water, the typical swirl around the balloon, then explosive hit, leaving the reel screaming and Ron loading up on a big kingi. Four times in a row we had the same result, and while Ron was busy fighting kings I had the added spectacle of watching kingis leaving huge holes in the water everywhere as they pounced on baitfish. By 8am a very shattered Ron had landed three very solid kingfish and all within 10 minutes of the harbour!

Of course, early morning isn't the only time to target them; for a second best, try a slack tide with a big kahawai under a balloon mid-late afternoon.

SERIOUS TACKLE

Don't go fishing for kingi's undergunned! About the only time I will use light line is in our annual light tackle tournament and while we land our fair share, you can guarantee there will be a few tears and choice words said as some fish get lost! Most of the good kingi spots in close to the coastline are shallow and reefy and the pinnacles at the Aldermens Islands tend to be razor sharp. There is nothing worse than being busted off on a good fish, especially if you know that fish is going to carry around a souvenir for the rest of his probably short life.

The best kingi rigs in my mind are the latest speed jigging rods together with a well matched high speed and high capacity reel. Go for quality, a well known brand and make

'Targeting East Coromandel Kingis'

sure the rod is going to have the grunt required to deal to a solid fish. Last year I had a kingi snap a supposedly new generation, ultra thin 24kg braid rod in half so go with your gut feel and stick with a rod that is going to do the job. When you're not fishing in competitions or for a record, load them up with braid. To put it simply I haven't been taken to the cleaners on one fish on braid, but there have been plenty of frustrating times on mono. Even when locked up on a kingi they still have that little bit of stretch to take you into the reef but with braid you've always got so much more of an advantage and ability to turn the fish's head around.

Other pieces of essential tackle include a good 2-4kg rig for catching mackerel, and something a bit bigger for cubing pilchards to catch kahawai to use as bigger livebaits.

As far as terminal tackle, good quality swivels, large circle hooks (I use the big red hapuka hooks), a big supply of 200, 300 and 400gm speed jigs in varying colours, flurocarbon for trace, an endless supply of balloons and a big supply of sabikis for liveys. Simple!

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

A favourite time to fish for XOS kingi's and put all of this into practice is the annual Tairua Stand Up Competition, held on the last weekend of January every year. Not only are there some monster kingis accessible around the Aldermens in late January it is also a chance to win some great prizes!

The Saturday prior to the tournament this year saw us outside the Aldermen islands sussing out where the big kingfish were holding with the coastline further in, seemingly devoid of any kingis interested in livebaits. On board was Dave Cross over from the UK for his annual mission to target a big New Zealand kingfish.

If there is one thing you have to love about the Poms – they don't like to give up! Dave kept cranking the big green and gold jig up from the depths with sweat pouring from his forehead. One after the other, rat kingis would be pouncing over the jigs and we would have released over 20 kingis, much to the skipper's delight in freeing frenzied thrashing fish every couple of minutes. Sure enough though, amidst those little fellas was a good king waiting to pounce and soon enough Dave was buckled over a monster king determined to pull Dave over the side of the boat. The fish put up an epic fight never giving in and still peeling line off 20 minutes later. Soon enough he pulled in a fish close to 20kgs, a very respectable kingfish for the Aldermen Islands and the biggest kingfish brought into Tairua at that stage in the season.

I was pretty confident that if we could get into another kingi like that in the tournament we'd have a good crack at taking the kingfish section out.

TOURNAMENT TIME

The Stand Up competition is fished over two days and we were determined to get off to a good start. Fishing with me was Philip Binder who has recently moved over to the Coromandel from Austria. So much for a very early start as the alarm was misset and we were a touch late on the water. Oh well, forget catching liveys, it was flat tack out to the Aldermen Islands and out the back to the same structure that produce the big king the week before.

We had a perfect drift with a very light SW wind taking us in the best possible direction over



the reef. The first drop, a rat king. The second drop, another rat king. We didn't have to wait any longer than that, the very next drop and I was loaded up on what I originally thought was an average sized king; until he hit the turbo boost button and showed his true colours! Line was peeling off the reel at an alarming rate and the sounder showed 22m – damn!

Not to worry, Philip took a crash course in driving the boat and expertly led us out into 70m of water. Double damn! At this stage the line dug into the spool and there were a few choice words Philip has probably not heard in Austria. We pulled the fish along and off the reef with the reel locked up, expecting the line would pop any minute. It didn't though and having some angle on the fish helped, as it swam along with the boat until finally I could get some line back.

After spending the last two months putting others on to kingfish and telling them every so politely to 'harden up and get the fish in' it was time for some payback as the arms started aching pulling the big fish up from the depths. Twenty minutes later we had colour under the boat and a big king cruised up to the side of the boat to the waiting gaff. Hitting the scales at 23kg – a 50 pound king and good enough to win 1st prize in the comp. The research the week before had paid off – same spot, same jig and a slightly bigger fish!

IN THE KITCHEN

Kingis have to be one of the most versatile fish as far as cooking goes. They make some of the best sashimi and filleted then cubed can be cooked in so many different ways, seared, crumbed, fried in curries or on kebabs – the flesh is very firm and holds together so well in cooking. The most important thing is not to overcook and leave slightly firm in the middle.

There is a lot of flesh on a big kingfish, but don't be tempted to just take the fillets off and discard the rest, there is still a lot of flesh left on the kingfish after it has been filleted - if you are going to take a fish like this from the ocean do it the honour of making the most of it!

Some of the best eating on the kingfish is the 'flaps' or 'wings' and the head. Make sure you get these smoked as soon after catching the fish as possible. Otherwise pop them in the freezer for smoking later. The knuckles of the skeleton or frame are also great coated in a bit of sweet chilli sauce, crumbed then fried – like fish spare ribs! Just run the knife into the sinewy part of the knuckle and they split open very easily.

Sitting with an ice cold beer, eating kingfish sashimi and recounting the battles of the weekend is just about as good as it gets to my mind! Enjoy!

