February heralds the end of the holiday season so things down here should start to get back to normal – if there is such a thing.

There’s no denying that the very large influx of visitors to the NSW South (and North) Coast is a great thing for the areas involved, with lots of money poured into the local economies in the form of accommodation, fuel, bait and meals, etc. In fact, many tourism-oriented businesses rely on January to get them through the quieter times mid-year.

For those of us who live in small coastal towns, the population explosion can be a bit hard to take at times, especially if you plan on getting out to wet a line yourself. For most of the year we don’t have to queue up at boat ramps or service stations waiting. We also get to fish in peace most of the time without having to fight for a spot so I, for one, will be looking forward to getting out this month.

Another loss?

In last month’s column I hinted at plans to have Beecroft Weapons Range closed to the public because of safety concerns. This effectively makes off-limits most of the handful of fishable rock platforms left on the Currarong Peninsula after the introduction of Sanctuary Zones for Jervis Bay Marine Park.

This month I can report that Lake Wollumboola has been included in the Jervis Bay Marine Park. This lake has seen its share of controversy over the years, with many Culburra residents divided over plans to have its foreshores developed, while others have been pushing to have it remain untouched.

Being included in the Jervis Bay Marine Park will probably secure its future but if it’s made a sanctuary zone then it, too, will be off-limits to anglers. That means that a bloody large area of the Shoalhaven will be a no-fishing zone. The NSW Government claims that two years of consultation went on before Wollumboola was included but I was involved in a lot of the marine park discussions about zoning and I never heard Wollumboola brought up once in two years.. Go figure...

February stars

This is a top month down this way and I’ve said before that there can be so many species about that it can be hard to decide what to fish for. Last February was typical, so let’s have a look back at how it went.

From the rocks there were so many blackfish that you could have walked on them some days. We fished north and south of Jervis Bay and caught fish to a kilo just about everywhere. Some days they were up on top in scum lines while on others they were down deeper in washes and responding to berley.

We used cabbage for bait most of the time but we also caught fish by berleying with bread and even fishing small pieces of bread crust under a bobby cork. When the fish were up on top, they responded well to floating pieces of bread and I even managed a few on bread flies when it was calm enough to fly-fish.

Last February the pelagics were pretty quiet but this year has started off very well, with some big schools of salmon and striped tuna about. Bonito seem to be a thing of the past down this way since the pros started targeting them – a big shame. I used to love chasing bonnies with fly or light threadline tackle but you could count the number of fish I’ve caught in the past two seasons on one hand.

The first Summer it happened we all just thought it was a seasonal thing but, after several seasons of very few or no bonito, we discovered they were being targeted by pros out wider and not even making it in close. What a shame! They are a great sportfish and even taste OK if you look after them. Looks like they’ll go the same way as so many of our other sportfish that have been decimated by commercial over-fishing.

On a brighter side, we experienced some great bream and flathead fishing in the Shoalhaven River last February. Just about everywhere we fished we had good catches of lizards to over 80cm along with bream to almost a kilo. Small hard bodies lures worked well but the big standouts were soft plastics fished very slowly. It didn’t matter if it was around flats or over drop-offs or even among snags. As long as you fished the right-sized plastics slowly, you caught fish.

Outside the fishing was also pretty spectacular. I can remember Craig Murphy scoring a billfish grand slam out at the Canyons with black, blue and striped marlin in the one day. The marlin weren’t thick last year but they showed up for several weeks in good numbers last February and some good fish were tagged out wide.

In closer, there were reds about for those who found some reef and anchored off it so that their berley and baits drifted back to where the fish were. A few crews were catching some reds to 4kg just about every trip when conditions and current were right.

Night jewies
Back in the river there were some nice jewies caught at night. Most were caught on live baits or squid pieces but a few locals were casting lures and catching a few.

A week either side of the full moon is the optimum time for jew in the river and somehow I reckon there'll be a lot more taken on big soft plastics this Summer. I've already heard of quite a few being taken in December from several land-based locations along the river so stay tuned.

Off the local beaches there was some great fun to be had chasing bream and whiting. Most were taken on beach worms and pipis by anglers not afraid of walking for 500 metres or so and getting away from the crowds.

There was even the odd school jewie early in the morning or late in the afternoon. Also around off the beaches were salmon and tailor for those throwing lures or ganged pilchards.

Now that covers a lot of fishing and it doesn't really matter whether you fish the beach, rocks, estuary or outside. There's something there for just about everyone and it just goes to show why February is the month when I find it hard to decide what to fish for. There just aren't enough days in this month!

TRANSPARENCIES

1

There should be more than a few marlin about at the moment, including blacks around The Banks and stripes out wider.

2

John Knowles with a solid bream that ate an Attack minnow at a secret location.

3

With a heap of Currarong LBG platforms off-limits this Summer, The Tubes is likely to look like this 24 hours a day in January and February.

Images