

Bream Lines

Chris Dunham looks at specific fly line options for chasing bream.

I would like to make a public declaration of my undying admiration for *Acanthopagrus butcheri*. There - it's out of the piscatorial closet. I love bream!

What a fish is our bream. Given time they can grow to sixty centimetres, weigh as much as four kilos and live for many decades. Be they black, yellow fin or northern pikey; be they in brackish water, still water, shallow lakes, lagoons, open salt water or rocky coastline; bream are as at home around busy metro marinas as they are in a picture postcard estuary in some remote place. And we (lucky buggers that we are) have the opportunity to wander down to almost any suburban waterway and take our best shot. In the Australian tradition of asking the bleeding obvious – how good is that?

Bream (or Senor Butcheri as I often call them) live all over the shop, from Tasmania to way up north where the sun burns and the insects bite. Which is great but it does present me with a wee problem. When I am asked to recommend lines, flies and other terminal stuff for attacking bream over such a variety of locations and temperatures, I could go the usual, "Mate, ya just need an 8 weight and a few clousers", and to an extent that would do the job, but it falls short of providing really useful information. So here is a more detailed look at just two situations and the fly line options needed to deliver fly patterns effectively.

ESTUARY DROPOFFS AND CHANNELS

Location number one is a southern estuary that is fed by two rivers from two separate watersheds; one with tea coloured water, the other clear and fast. The estuary proper is primarily white sand with flats scarred by runoff channels and streams that are

cleaned, replenished and recut by every tidal change. The estuary sand bar which guards the main channel is open all year round and protects the flats from heavy seas but not from the sea wind which takes over during the summer months. While the water temperature allows for wading during summer it is not what most would call warm water, and the wind can cool the shallow flats water to be uncomfortably cold in double quick time.

There are plenty of good 'breamy' spots to explore, with half exposed sand banks, drop-offs and a variety of water clarity to provide safe holding water, and perhaps most importantly, the water is almost constantly moving.

Slide your boat silently up to the back of a sand bar with the help of the prevailing breeze and carefully scan the drop-off edge on the far side. How to get a fly into the zone without the fish suspecting there is a string attached? This is where a decision needs to be made about what fly to start with and at what water depth you want to fish. As the water is shallow and stained, and the breeze light, my first fly is an estuary black BMS tied to a longish 10 lb leader.

A carefully pre-stretched weight forward floating fly line is my line of choice here and I've chosen a Rio Nymph WF4F with the orange strike indicator section cut off. There are a whole swag of weight forward floating lines that are generally considered to be trout lines produced by Rio, Scientific Anglers (SA), Teeny and a number of other brands which do a fine job in this situation. The more aggressive versions such as the SA GPX and Rio's Rio Grande are about 0.3 to 0.5 of a line weight heavier than their stated line class and can be easier for shorter casts as they are inclined to load the rod with less line out.

Muz Wilson's BMS pattern, here in his black version, has become a classic bream fly.





Nat Bromhead

Drop-offs adjacent to food-rich flats are very productive haunts for all the bream species.

Once the first shallow edge has been explored with the floating line and BMS, grab the straight intermediate or intermediate/floating fly line and a bead chain BMS and work over the same drop-off, only a little further out and a little deeper. The intermediate line should more or less match the rate of decent of the bead chain BMS and keep you in good touch with the fly. More often than not a class 1 intermediate will do well in this situation as the maximum rate of decent is about 2.5" per second. Rio's Aqualux Lake line (available down to 4 weight) is well suited to working in the temperature ranges experienced in these estuaries.

Some tropical core temperature lines can be used during summer in the south, but not all, and a certain amount of experimentation needs to be done to see if this option suits you. The potential down side is constantly coiling loose line, but the upside is a nice stiff line which holds really tight loops for distance work. Scientific Anglers Bonefish Intermediate in six weight is a tropical class 1 (1.5" to 2" per second decent rate) line with a front taper more akin to the presentation of many freshwater lines and has found favour with some southern estuary anglers. Out of the box this line can be identified by its clear outer coating and visible inner core. These lines produce a slight singing noise when shooting through the guides courtesy of their slightly dimpled surface. There is another version of the same line available from time to time labelled Surf Colour. This is distinguished from the clear tropical line by its slightly milky blue colour. It is also considered a more temperate line. Either way you'll need to carefully

pre-stretch the line to get it into a shape suitable for fishing. Get a mate to hold the leader end of the line and peel off a normal working length, lean back on the line until you feel the stretch has been pulled out and then gently release the pressure.

Back at the sand bar, if you've searched the upper water column extensively with the BMS, repeat the search with a BMS hammerhead and a type 3 line which will match the rate of decent and deal with the current in deep water. I have spent some time playing with Rio's relatively new Outbound Floating/Intermediate, Outbound Type 3 and Outbound Type 6 lines and they work very well in these situations. They also have a particularly wide temperature range from winter through to about thirty five degrees. Currently available down to six weight, if they were produced in four and five weights in tropical and temperate core I'd be one happy camper.

These types of lines are generally referred to as integrated shooting head lines and most manufacturers have at least one version in their catalogue. Typically the head section is quite long and often over 40 feet in length with the head and running line sections being different colours. The darker the head section the heavier it is and the faster it sinks.

You can try another pass in still deeper water, with a floating line and weighted fly for a rapid rise and fall jiggling action, though this is fairly ungainly to cast and has other down sides, most of which were covered in



Intermediate Lines – left to right.
 SA Bonefish WF6S (clear, intermediate Tropi-Core), SA Bonefish WF8S (surf), Rio Aqualux Lake WF4I (aqua/clear), Rio Aqualux Striped Bass WF7I (clear).

Intermediate Head Lines – from left to right.
 Rio Outbound WF6F/I (yellow/clear), Rio Outbound WF6I/S3 (yellow/brown), Rio Outbound WF6I/S6 (gray/black), Cortland 444 Down Under WF7I (light blue/clear).

the 'Light Line Bream' article of Issue One. The water is a little thrashed by now anyway so you might as well give it a shot.

There is another line and fly option however that requires a little more patience but is a good option if you are alone or your fishing mate has the patience to wait or join in. With the use of a full sinking type 3 or faster sinking class line you can tether a neutral buoyancy or floating pattern just above the sandy bottom. Attach a fairly short length of light tippet material (perhaps 60 cm of 8 lb) to the line and tie on a fly such as a floating yabby. Using a smooth six to 10 inch retrieve, the fly will wiggle down towards the sand and during the pause between retrieves will gently wiggle back towards the surface – altogether an almost irresistible action for bream. Just remember that the pause needs to be at least three times as long as the retrieve in order for it to rise sufficiently in the water column.

In hot weather estuary systems with similar topography to the southern estuary you'll need to change your line selection. These are some lines worth considering for the heat and while far from an exhaustive list it will give you a few ideas. Cortland 444 Down Under WF7F/I

is a floating/intermediate combination line. The head section is almost a class two intermediate in terms of its sink rate and while it is best cast with one back cast only and then 'firing' off into the distance, the head is also long enough to be used for short, quick casts. The running line of both the 444 and the Rio Outbound Intermediate line are floating which makes for easy line management when wading. For best results it is worth cleaning these lines straight out of the packet with products such as Rio AgentX, or similar.

When distance is the objective there's little point trying to cast these integrated head lines with only half of the head section out of the rod tip. Have confidence in your casting, grab the bull by the dangly bits and see how much of the head section you can 'lift' off the water and cast. You'll be surprised and delighted with how efficient it is, and you have the added bonus of eliminating false casting over the sacred bream holding zone.

For tropical floating lines there is the SA Bonefish line. Available down to five weight it has a longish front taper. The SA Redfish has a shorter more aggressive front taper and provides quick rod loading. It is a good

Floating patterns, such as this yabby, are very effective when fished on sinking lines.





Full sink and wet tip lines – from left to right.
 Rio Density Compensated Type 3 WF5S3 (brown), SA Striped Bass Type IV WF7S (dark gray), Rio Bonefish WF6F/1 (tan/clear), SA Wet Tip Clear Saltwater WF6F/S (yellow/clear).



Tropical Floaters - from left to right;
 Rio Tropical Clouser WF7F, SA Bonefish WF5F (horizon), SA Redfish WF6F (dark horizon), Rio Accelerator X WF4F (tan).

'point and shoot' line. The Rio Florida Bonefish floats well and can deal with really hot weather and there is a version with a rod length of clear intermediate tip. Their Tropical Clouser line has a shorter, more aggressive head section line that helps to turn over weighted and wind resistant flies. These floating lines are super easy to pick up off the water but are of course prone to being driven across the surface by wind.

You can pretty much count out all of the trouty-type cool weather lines in the heat as they don't have the stiffness of core and their outer coating become sticky in the heat, which will lead to much frustration and cursing. One exception might be Rio's AcceleratorX floating line which is promoted as a distance line and has held up well in central Queensland temperatures.

Unfortunately there are very few light line weight intermediate and sinking tropical lines. SA's Bonefish Intermediate is available in 6 weight. The SA Type IV (3.75 to 6.5 ips) starts at 7 weight, as does the Cortland 444 Down Under. Unless the line manufacturers see significant potential sales in light weight tropical saltwater lines our only option for going light and hot is to cut and splice lines to suit. Don't throw out any of those prop chopped heavier weight fly lines as they can make excellent light weight line fodder with a little experimentation. This includes the running line sections, not just prematurely shortened head sections.

At this point you've probably started to think I have one serious line fetish, and you are probably right. But it's the one area where I hear the greatest degree of confusion and complaint from fly fishers, with the most common being, "The blasted thing gets all coiled up!" Most high end lines are pretty good but most will also only really work well within a certain temperature range.

Back to the sand bar again. You've done three passes with three different flies to cover the progressive depths of the drop off and caught nothing! No point standing there like a big dork, get back in that boat and get hunting.

PYLONS, MARINAS AND OYSTER LEASES

Location number two: the bridge pylon, marina and oyster lease. All within a short drive of most urban areas and a happy hunting zone for seriously big bream. All of these structures have mussels growing on them and the more mature the bream become the more they feed upon these shellfish. Marinas provide bream with a fairly safe home where it's difficult for dolphins to chase them and they can graze without the risks of dining out on exposed flats.

Muz Wilson ties a black salty BMS which has that same purple blue black colour as a mussel shell. This fly does well attached to a fairly long and strong (at least 12 lb) leader to a floating, intermediate or full sinking line, depending on water depth and current speed. Deliver the fly right onto the pylon, and I mean right onto it. Not 30 cm off it but 0.5 cm off it. Put your rod tip in the water and watch the fly disappear.

There are many variables here and therefore no single common situation to describe, but some important aspects to consider and adapt to are; how close do you get to the structure before your presence

Black Salty BMS, a proven mussel imitation.



Good suburban upper estuary bream water with reeds, oyster shells and a light chop on the water to provide cover.



**Temperate Floaters – from left to right:
Rio Nymph WF5F (camo), Rio Coldwater Clouser WF6F (light chartreuse), Rio Grande WF5F (camo green), SA GPX WF5F (optic green).**

becomes a problem (it's further off than you think) and how much slack line/leader do you need to put into the delivery cast to allow the fly to fall into the strike depth without the line or current pulling the fly away from the structure in an unnatural manner? The whole premise of this situation is that the black salty BMS probably looks like a piece of mussel dislodged from further up the pylon by another bream and therefore worthy of a quick test chomp. This is how I, and others, have imagined it works and at any rate it does produce results. The hit is usually sudden. The run short and swift often ending in a shellfish cut tippet, a curse and sometimes a tumble back into the tinny. But the anticipation up there! It's hand-to-hand combat and those who have less than razor sharp reaction times or line management skills will miss the big ones. Two casts per pylon at any given depth is usually all you'll get and then it's time to move on.

Rio's Density Compensated Type 3, Aqualux Lake Line (available down to 4 weight) and Rio Deep 7 are all lines worth consideration, depending on the depth and speed of tidal flow. SA's Uniform Sink + lines do the same sort of job. All of these lines are designed for moderate water temperatures and could be comfortably used on the WA coast up to at least Geraldton in winter and usually in Perth through most of summer. On the East coast they're best suited in Queensland in winter and probably through to Sydney for most of summer, though this is just a rough guideline.

We now have so much choice in terms of fly line design for depth and temperature it can be almost overwhelming but don't let the options intimidate. Decide upon which one of those carefully crafted offerings will fool Senor Butcheri and then which line will get that fly into his backyard. You paid for those lines – now make them work for you!