

Fishing The Snags



By Steven Riding

Kayaks allow you to portage log jams, banks, rapids and shallow sections to access the best snags

More and more people are discovering that there are waterways that can be fished only from a kayak and fishing pressure in these areas is gradually increasing. Little creeks that you can sneak the kayak into and have a pretty good chance of catching an Australian bass are seeing a lot more anglers in plastic craft. This increase in angling pressure is making the bass even more wary and anglers need to sharpen their skills and adjust their techniques accordingly.

On one of my local creeks I have noticed kayak drag marks on the banks with increasing frequency and once productive snags rarely provide a bass. This got me thinking, what do I have to do to keep catching bass without travelling further and further afield to less pressured waterways?

In most of the creeks I fish there is that snag. You know, the one that is almost unfishable. A whole tree has fallen into

the water and made a huge lair for bass to feel safe and secure in. A lair full of lots of twiggy branches that are like a magnet, wanting to attract and grab hold of lure hooks and empty the tackle box and bank account further as more lures are purchased to replace the plastic that decorates the bass's home.

Fishing the edges of these snags usually produces a bass. However as fishing pressure has increased, the bass appear to stay deep

in their snaggy home, uninterested in the piece of plastic swimming closely by. So, what if it was possible to fish these snags with a lure without continuously snagging up? Surely some bass will be caught? The answer is a resounding 'yes'. Wanting to know how to fish the snags without huge lure losses and shutting down snags by trying to retrieve snagged lures got me experimenting with some techniques that have really improved my bass fishing.

TACKLE

Fishing deep in a snag is not the location for finesse fishing with light lines. The breaking strain of both mainline and leader need to be increased so that bass can be caught quickly and not easily bust you off so that they are then modelling the latest piercing. I have found that 12lb mainline and 20lb nylon or fluorocarbon trace has been more than adequate, with very few fish busting me off.

The reel drag needs to be tightened so that line is not easily given to the bass when it first strikes the lure. Fishing deep in the snags is a brutal affair and the bass need to be bullied out quickly so they don't have a chance to weave your line through their home.

MODIFYING LURES

There are a couple of ways to make a snag-loving lure a bit more snag resistant. I usually start by removing the centre treble. This helps a little bit, but the best method is to replace the treble hooks with upward riding single hooks. The Gamakatsu SL model is a great hook with a large eye that is in line with the hook point so that the hook always runs straight. A single hook may not hook up as easily as a treble, but the advantage of not snagging means that you spend more time fishing and less time trying to retrieve your lure once it is snagged.

It is worthwhile modifying both diving and surface lures if you want to use a favourite lure for snag fishing. The only

A selection of jigheads designed for fishing weedless from the surface to deep in the snags



hassle is that hard body lures can be expensive and with the possibility of chucking twenty bucks or more away, you may be hesitant to throw them deep into a snag where they may be lost forever.

SOFT PLASTICS

Soft plastics are a snag fisher's saviour, with most soft plastics costing around a dollar a piece and depending on the rigging method, you have a lure that for under five dollars you can throw into some scary country without having to mortgage the house or cause another GFC.

A weedless worm hook matched to a soft plastic is one of the best snagless lures available. The hook is designed so that, when rigged correctly, the soft plastic

protects the hook point from snagging, but when a fish strikes the soft plastic moves out of the way, exposing the hook point for hook up.

It is possible to fish the surface using a worm hook matched to a soft plastic that floats. My greatest success has been using ZMan 3" MinnowZ. Whatever the plastic is that ZMan lures are made from, it floats really well. Some other plastics slowly sink and can also be worked as a surface lure, but will sink if the lure is slowly worked or paused during the retrieve.

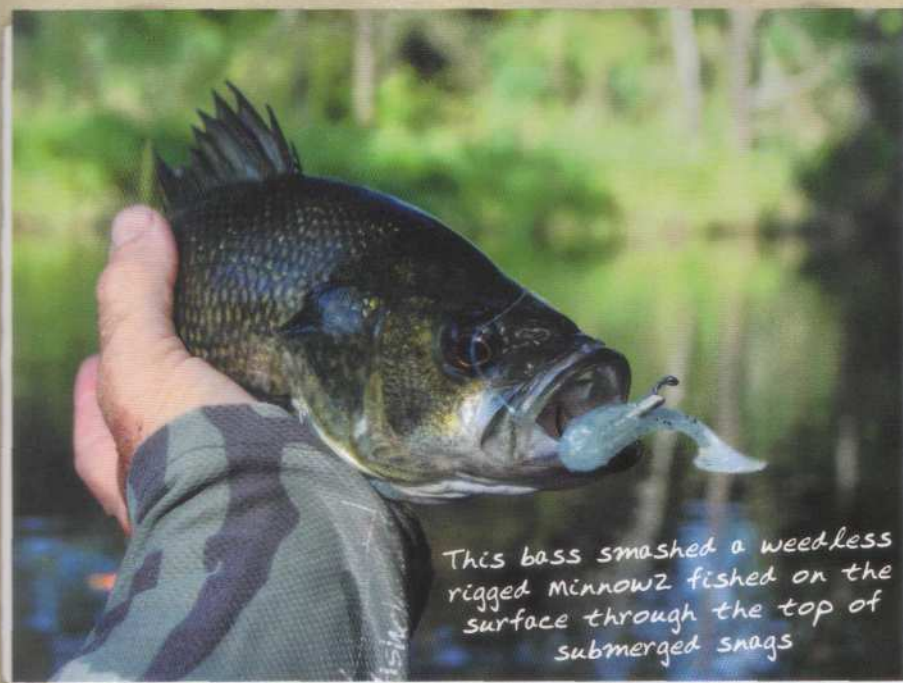
Just winding the softie across the surface of the water will present a lifeless action that does not appeal as much to bass, so action needs to be imparted to the lure using the rod. As the lure is on the surface, you can see what happens when the rod is moved in different ways.

I am regularly amazed by how life-like a lure can be made by mixing up retrieve speed and rod movement. By twitching the tip of the rod back and forth it is possible to make the soft plastic "walk the dog" so that it snakes across the surface. Sharp jabs of the rod tip will make water spray from the lure and the fast movement looks like a fleeing baitfish. By holding the rod tip high it is possible to retrieve the lure so it looks like a prawn skittering along the surface. Allowing the lure to rest on the surface during retrieves also seems to turn bass on with hits coming just after the lure starts movement again.

With a sinking soft plastic you need to keep retrieving the lure so you can keep it on the surface. But a deadly technique is to pause the lure right on the edge of



A nice smallmouth bass extracted from deep in a snag using a soft plastic rigged on a TT Lures Snake Head jighead



This bass smashed a weedless rigged minnowz fished on the surface through the top of submerged snags

the snag so it slowly sinks. With the lure just outside the bass's home, that first movement of the lure really seems to turn the bass on, as it thinks the lure is about to escape the snag and gain its freedom.

The best thing about a soft plastic rigged for surface fishing is that it is possible to fish locations that would be impossible to fish with a regular or modified hard body surface lure. Lily pad beds can be fished easily, with the holes in the lily pads worked over and then the lure easily

retrieved over the top of the lilies between holes. Twiggy snags can be fished, as the lure will easily go over the twigs without snagging as regularly as a trebled lure. Even fishing the other side of a lay down log is possible as you can drag the lure over the log during the retrieve. I have thrown these weedless plastics into some really crazy looking areas and been amazed how often they come back out without me having to paddle the yak into the snag to retrieve the lure.

This snag resistance does come with a downfall as the very thing that stops the lure from snagging up can stop the bass from hooking up. However the explosion of water from an Australian bass smacking a surface lure more than makes up for any fish that are missed.

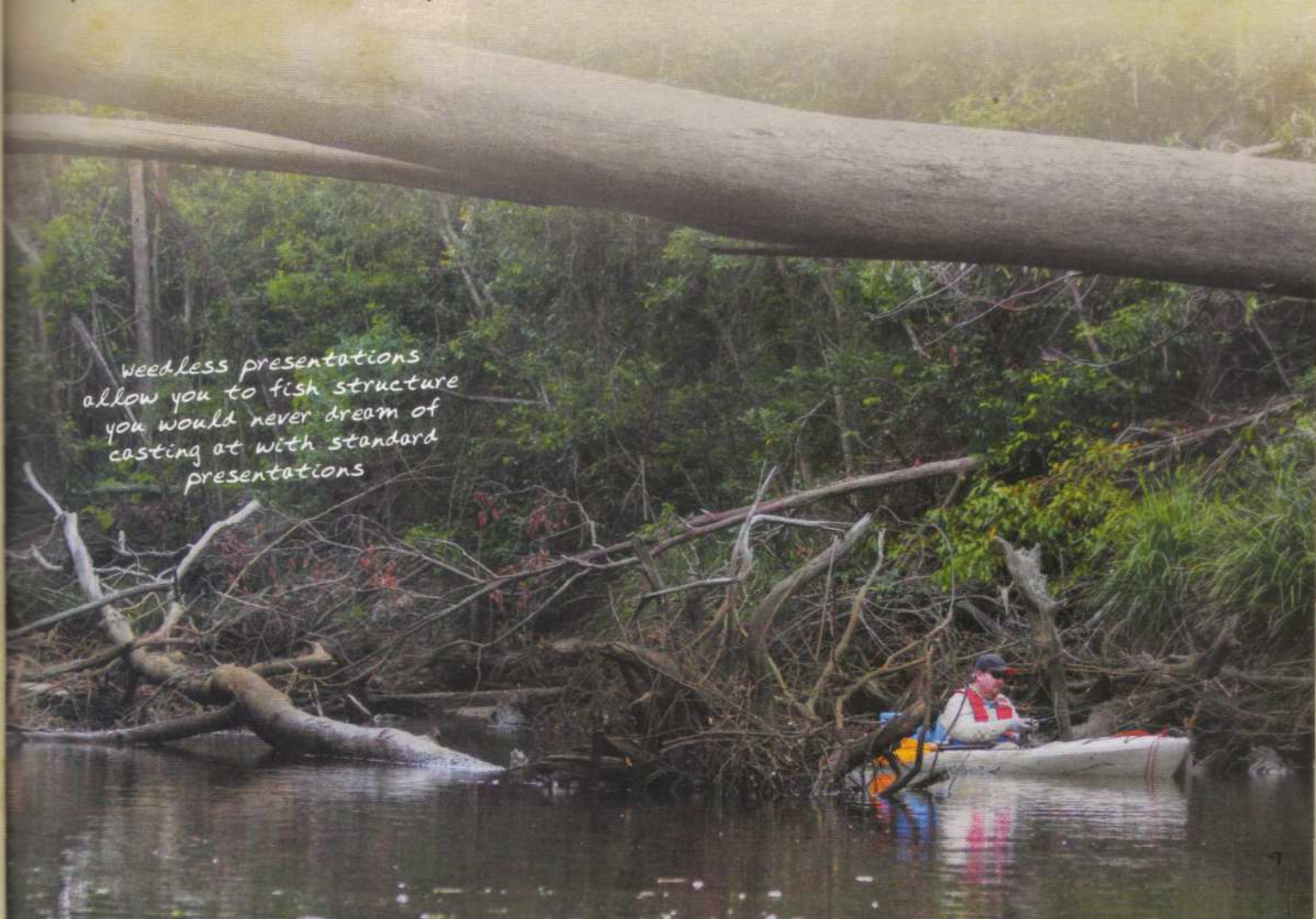
GETTING DOWN

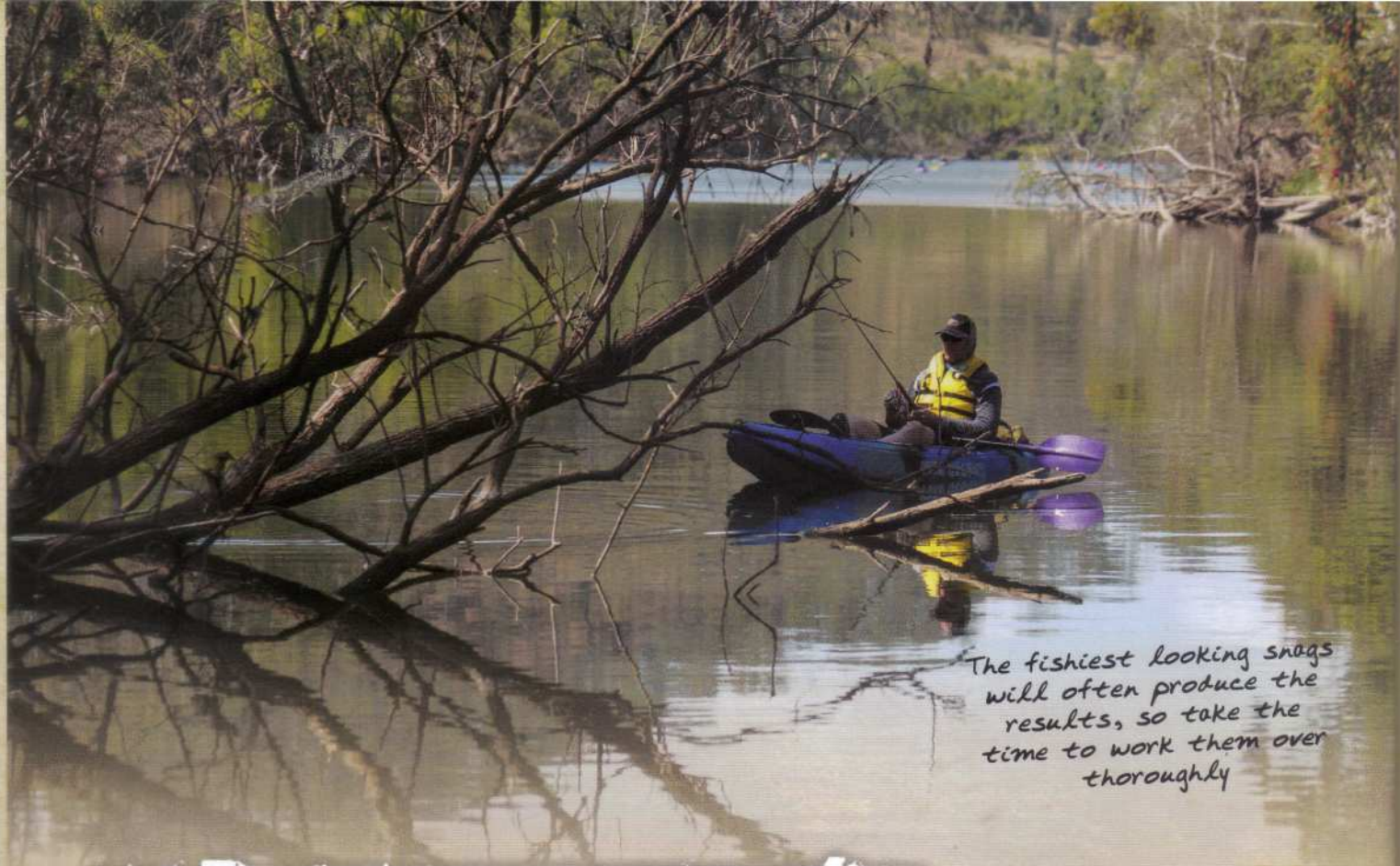
A weight can be added to the front of a worm hook by attaching a sinker with a loop knot. By varying the weight of the sinker and matching it to the buoyancy of the soft plastic, it is possible to customise a lure that can slowly sink into the snag or plummet straight to the bottom.

If you are looking for a snagless jighead, TT Lures make the Snake Head and Auspin has the Swingin' Hop and Swingin' Drop jigheads. These jigheads are comprised of a weedless worm hook with a weight attached to it with wire. I have found that both these options appear to be slightly more snag resistant than attaching a sinker with a loop knot.

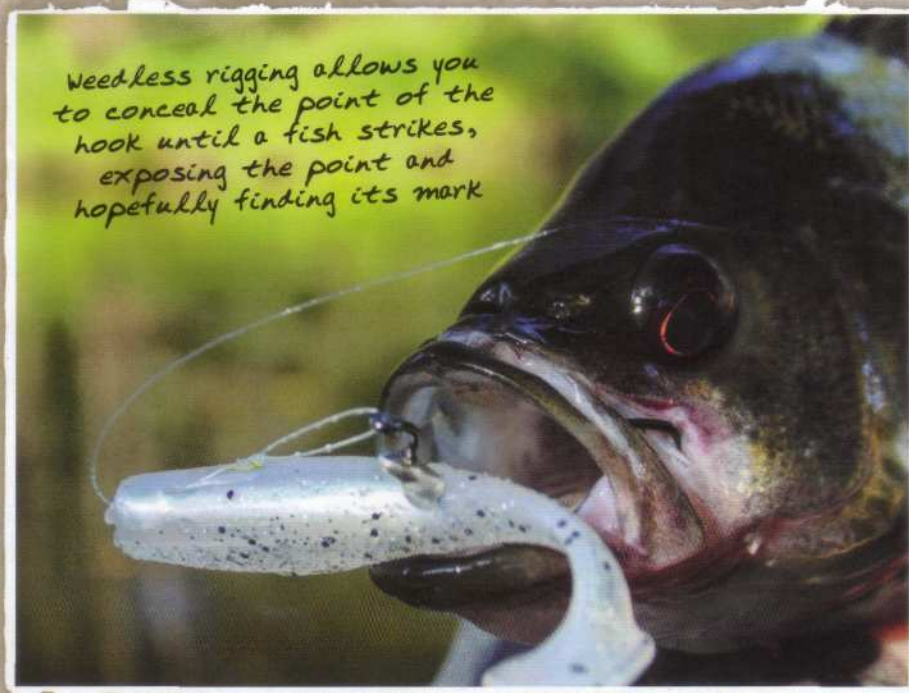
My technique for fishing a sinking soft plastic is to start on the outside edges of the snag. It is a lot easier to land a bass if it hits the lure away from the snag. It is important to engage the reel almost the moment the lure hits the water, as strikes

Weedless presentations allow you to fish structure you would never dream of casting at with standard presentations





The fishiest looking snags will often produce the results, so take the time to work them over thoroughly



Weedless rigging allows you to conceal the point of the hook until a fish strikes, exposing the point and hopefully finding its mark

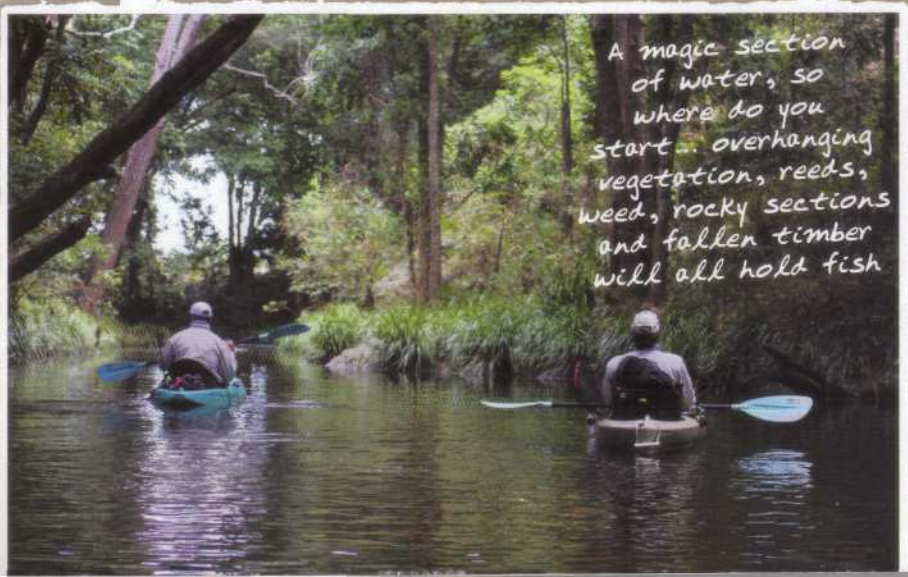
If the lure becomes snagged, stop retrieving immediately. This stops the lure getting further embedded in the snag. Paddling the kayak into the snag and using the rod to get the line back over the direction of travel usually dislodges the lure. If that doesn't work, it's time to get the tackle retriever out to try to bounce the lure off the snag.

GET OUT THERE

Next time you are out on the water and see that scary snag you now have a few options that may assist you in extracting a fish from it. Remember, these options are not just for Australian bass; they can be used in any snaggy situation and on any fish. Get out there and give it a go. You'll be glad you did.

can come at any time while the lure is sinking. By keeping a tight line, the lure is in direct contact with the rod and reel and does not allow the bass to get any spare line to weave through their home.

When the lure is retrieved through the snag you will feel the line and lure rubbing on the snag. A constant retrieve assists with the lure not snagging. When you can feel some tension of the lure, a quick flick of the rod tip does assist with getting the lure over the obstruction.



A magic section of water, so where do you start... overhanging vegetation, reeds, weed, rocky sections and fallen timber will all hold fish