

The basic gear required for Beach Fishing



Beach fly fishing: basic set-up

In Australia, most of us are fortunate enough to live close to some sort of beach or estuary system where there are a myriad of fly rod target species available. That being said, the most common question we get in the shop is "how do I fly fish the beach?" In this article we will look at what gear you need to successfully and comfortably fish many of Australia's beaches.

Rod choices

There is a wide choice of weights to choose from when selecting a fly rod but the most important principle when fishing the beach is choosing a single rod that can fulfil your needs. When choosing the rod you should look at the following criteria: 1. A rod that is light enough to carry and fish with all day 2. Can it deal with the prevailing wind and still cast most fly types that you may want to fish? 3. Will it handle the larger types of fish you're likely encounter, but is it still light enough to be fun with smaller fish?

The rods that fit these requirements usually fall in the medium-light to medium weight classes. To put that in line weight, you would normally choose a rod weight of 6, 7 or 8 but sometimes you could use a 5 and sometimes you should use a 9. Many fishermen use a 6 weight rod in most of their estuary fishing and only go to an 8 when the wind picks up or when bigger flies are required.

I also know many fishermen who use the 7 weight very successfully for a lot of their fishing and only really ever need the one rod. I have used an 8 weight for most of my fishing simply because I regularly have to contend with strong winds along the open beaches.

Ask yourself the following question: Am I going to fish mostly estuaries with some beach work? If yes, then look at getting a 6 or 7 weight. If your answer is no and you are going to fish mostly beaches with some estuary work, then go with a 7 or 8 weight. This article is not going to go into price or brand of rods because it is not necessary. There are good quality rods on the market that will fit everyone's budget but my recommendation for both rod and line is: Buy the best you can afford.

Reels

A lot of people will tell you a lot of different stories regarding the type of reel you should get, the only advice is that you should get the reel you can afford. Preferably pick a reel with a large arbor that can comfortably hold approximately 250 metres of 30lb backing plus the fly line. Try to get a reel with good anodising and a washable or sealed drag system. Make sure it fits the rod and line weight you have chosen and that it balances everything nicely. These days most reels come with a recommended line weight rating that they can be used on. You are looking for something that is easy to use and easy to maintain. A beach reel does not need to break the bank and I regularly fish with some excellent beach fly fishermen that use reels dating from around the time I was born (late 80's).

Lines

Your choice of line is as important, if not more important than your choice of rod. A good quality line will make an average rod cast better but even the most expensive rods will have a tough time with cheap, low-quality lines. Get the best line you can afford. The Rio Mainstream saltwater line is an excellent choice for those looking for a quality starter line, however it only starts at a 7 weight.



When you buy a line make sure you match the line weight with the rod weight. That means that if you buy a 6 weight rod, buy yourself a 6 weight line. There is really no reason for a beginner to go heavier or lighter than the rod's weight and it will only cause issues down the line when you are learning how to cast. In other words, don't listen to that friend who has "fly fished for years", just make sure the numbers are the same and you won't have any issues.

Floating, Sinking or Intermediate? If you are starting out then you should fish with a floating line, or floaters as they are sometimes called. A floater is the easiest line to cast and allows the novice angler a bit more control. It can be fished successfully at various depths by using weighted flies and many tuna have been taken on floating lines. If you are going to fish the estuaries then this should be your primary line.

If you are going to be fishing the beaches on a regular basis then your primary line should be an intermediate or sinking line, depending on how rough the surf conditions are. This is necessary to allow the line to sink below the waves and to prevent it from getting washed around as much as a floater. I like to fish a line that sinks slowly in light to medium surf, and the standard intermediate lines from the major manufacturers all seem to work well. A line with a fast sinking tip or head is a good line when you are fishing rough condition and strong winds. The most important part about beach fishing is that you need to do it often and in different conditions. A beach fisherman needs to be comfortable with their gear and their casting before they start chopping and changing what lines they are going to use. Once a flyfisher is comfortable with their casting and gear then they can experiment with shooting head systems. A good example of a beach fishing shooting head would be the T-family system (a shooting head made from something like T-14 or T-17 fast sinking line) with a monofilament running line. This is a very popular system in the US and can work in your favour when long distances are required. Just make sure you know how to cast them. Another option is a manufactured shooting head available from one of the various fly line manufacturers.

Leaders

A standard 9 to 10 foot tapered leader will work well in most beach fishing applications. A store bought, tapered leader always ensures that you get good energy transfer and a nice lay-out of the fly. I use both store bought and handmade leaders, depending on my mood on the day. If I am in the right mood I tie some leaders to keep in my pack for future use. The lightest breaking strain for use in the surf should be around 10lb, because you never know what might come swimming along, but also carry some 20lb, 15lb and 8lb leaders just in case. If you tie your own leaders then you can play around with the breaking strains and tapers.

Flies

When it comes to flies for use on surf beaches it is hard to beat the classics. The main idea behind your fly choice, regardless of where you are fishing, is to think about what you are trying to imitate. What are the fish feeding on? What is the most common bait in the area? What can you cast and fish the best in the prevailing conditions? This is a simple list of the flies we use most often in the surf in no specific order.

- Surf candies (easy to cast, low maintenance if made correctly)
- Clouser Minnows (Simple to tie, gets down deep, can be fragile in the surf when tied with natural materials)
- Gotcha/Crazy Charlie type flies (simple to tie, imitates various prey species)
- Deceivers (larger profile, natural materials can be fragile)
- Poppers and other Surface flies
- Any fly that is a good general imitator of beach prey species
 - Prey species on the beach can include sand crabs, various bait fish species, beach worms, sand fleas and sometimes even small prawns or shrimps.

Beach fishing is a very fun way of fishing and an it can get very exciting when you finally find a gutter holding some good fish. However I use the word 'finally' on purpose as it may sometimes take a lot of work to find the fish. Be prepared to walk long distances when beach fishing and spend some time on each gutter. There are many people that will tell you that you need to fish the surf at this time of day during that type of tide, and they might be correct, but I have to fit in my fishing whenever I can and I go regardless of the tide or time of day. Of course I prefer a specific set of circumstances and early morning is my preferred time to go fishing, but go when you can.