

The Gumbaynggirr people have always depended on the ocean (**gaagul**) for food and other resources. Traditional knowledge, which is still in use today, has been passed down through generations about how to catch different fish, when to catch them, and which bait types to use.



Methods

Many different fishing methods are used by the Gumbaynggirr people to catch and gather fish. Fish are caught using nets (**mayaray**), spears (**biguurr**), or by fishing at night with a torch and spear (**muyambiya**) in the ancient stone fish traps at Arrawarra Headland (see Fact Sheet 3). Lightweight, floating fishing spears can be made from cottonwood hibiscus, grass tree and brown kurrajong. Stronger spears are made from hardwood timbers like wattles and eucalypts. Local people also go fishing (**birraangi**) using hooks (**garran**) and fishing line (**birraagaygu**).



◀ Photo

Traps and nets were made from natural fibres such as the bark of the cottonwood hibiscus.

In the past, men would fish off the rocks or beach using hooks fashioned from the shells of turban snails (**gugumbal**), abalone and other molluscs found on rocky shores. These shellfish were harvested as a common food

source, and later, rocks were used to sharpen the broken shell fragments into fishing hooks and other useful implements. The sharp shells were also made into tools for gutting and cleaning (**wida-wida**) the day's catch. The fishing line was often made from the inner bark (**malu**) of the cottonwood hibiscus (see Fact Sheet 11). When twisted tightly, this twine is renowned for its strength.

For special occasions, gatherings or ceremonies, a greater catch of fish was needed. At these times, the men would use canoes (**baagu**) to fish from. Canoes were commonly carved from the trunks of honeysuckle banksia trees that grow in this area. One of these canoes, dated back to 1880, is on display at the Yarrawarra Aboriginal Cultural Centre.

Did you know?

Middens are often used to determine what Indigenous people were eating many years ago. The excavation of the midden at Arrawarra Creek (see Fact Sheet 8) found bones from 12 different fish species, as well as tools used to catch, scale and cut fish.

FACT SHEET 4 Traditional Fishing



Bait

As with all fishing, different baits are used to catch different types of fish at different times of the year. For example, a green seaweed, commonly called sea lettuce, is often used to attract and catch blackfish (**warraagan**). The Garby Elders also use cungevoi as burley to attract a range of different species into the ancient stone fish traps at Arrawarra Headland (see Fact Sheet 3).



◀ Photo

Blackfish are an important food species and, from midden records, have been for thousands of years.

Fish Species Targeted

A huge number of different fish species are found around Arrawarra and fished for by the Garby Elders. Some of the most commonly caught edible fish (**yamaarr**) include bream, snapper, whiting, flathead, tailor, mullet and blackfish. One of the most popular fish to catch is the jewfish; drummer, perch, parrotfish, as well as sharks and stingrays, are also caught.

"There are lots of different types of bait to catch different fish [...] We would use pipis to catch bream, cungi to catch parrotfish and bream and grouper, [and] you could catch jewfish with octopus or live worms. I would use pipis or worms to catch whiting, and pilchards if you wanted tailor. Mullet is a good live bait for catching lots of different fish. My favourite is whiting; it's the best. A really good whiting is great; I would use live beach worms to catch them."

Uncle Milton Duroux



◀ Photo

The large number of bream bones found in the Arrawarra midden suggests that they were a very popular fish.

Please note that NSW Department of Primary Industries bag and size limits apply.

Photos: Adam Davey; Matt Harrison; Margie Mohring; Steve Smith.

Lingo

bagubany: perch
buluunggal: mullet
dangu: whiting
gaayi: bream
giyangarri: snapper
gulaygarr: drummer
gunulgin: grouper
jurruwal: tailor
miijan: flathead
ngalaany: stingray
ngaliwal: jewfish
warraagan: black fish
yamaarr: edible fish
yanggay: shark

▼ Photo

The practice of spearing fish caught in the fish traps continues today.




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