

Fishing the Ciskei Coast

The Ciskei coast has long been regarded by fishermen as one of the best stretches of coastline in the country. Prized for its versatility, the Ciskei offers the enthusiast everything from rock and surf fishing to estuary and river fishing. In fact, all the coastal villages/resorts along the Ciskei coast are situated on the banks of a river/estuary. These rivers are mostly blind all year round except for the Hamburg which is open all year round. These rivers hold good Cob, Spotted Grunter and Leervis/Garrick and great fun can be had on light tackle.

A brief outlay of the Ciskei coastal villages and popular fishing spots are outlined below.

Hamburg

This coastal village is situated on the banks of the Keiskamma River. An excellent river, which at one stage held the long-standing South African record for a cob of 73kg. The beach to the right of the river mouth is known as “the Car Park” with the first section of rocks being called “Car Park Rocks”. Hamburg is famous for its catches of good cob and ragged tooth sharks. In the summer months flatfish such as sand sharks and blue-rays can be targeted. From the car park one can see a rocky point in the distance, this is known as Kings Ledge, also a good ragged tooth shark spot. From this point there is scattered rock and reef until you get to a small beach which is known as “Lions Bay”. One can target bluefish and Black Steenbras along these reefs until the beach starts.

Mtana

Next to Hamburg is Mtana. Not a village as such, Mtana can be accessed via a dirt road as you come into Hamburg and this section of coast is named after the secluded blind river. Unfortunately one must park their vehicle here at own risk. There are some really good spots such as Gilberts which is right of the river mouth before the rocks start. This spot usually always holds good surf formation and an array of species can be caught here. Bonnet Bay and Big Breaker Bay are also very good ragged tooth shark spots and can be found just past Gilberts – as the name suggests they are bays and are surrounded by rocks which make them easily identifiable.

Bigha/Bira

Also a favourite along the Ciskei coast. Bira has long been regarded as one of the best bluefish spots on our coast. The most popular spot to the left of the river mouth is “Madagascar reef.” Upon entry into Bigha one will notice a large reef out at sea – this is known as Madagascar reef and the section of beach and rocks directly behind is named after it. When washed out, this spot is covered in green weed which is the staple diet of the bluefish. Good Cob and Black Steenbras can be caught here as well. For the non-edible anglers, “The Boiler” often produces raggies as well as cow sharks when the water is really cold and dirty. “The Boiler” is identifiable by a large flagpole on the beach which is also to the left just past “Madagascar Reef.” If you are feeling energetic, a further walk up the beach of approximately 5km and you will end up at “Gusha Surf”. There are a handful of houses perched on top of the river here overlooking the Gusha River. A seldom fished spot that produces an array of species.

Mgwalana/Mtati

These two rivers and resorts are situated very closely together and access is limited as it is private property. Mgwalana itself is very well known for its catches of Bluefish and Pig-nose grunter. Small raggie pups can be targeted at “Little raggie bay” which is approximately 700m right of the river mouth.

Mpekweni

Situated on the banks of the Mpekweni river lies the Mpekweni resort. Most of the popular fishing spots are right of the river mouth. When the sea is flat, one can target an array of species from the Mpekweni surf including Kob, Pignose, flatfish etc. A popular spot here is Mpekweni corner – this is the piece of surf up against the first section of rocks which is known as Mpekweni Point. The point itself can be fished on a flat sea but seldom produces. Right next to the point is a small bay known as “Insurance Bay” - named by competitive anglers, as one is always sure to catch something here. Basically everything can be caught here depending on formation. From here all along the rest of the coast, Black Steenbras are abundant as the coastline changes to scattered reef. A further kilometre walk past the Point will bring you to a bay known as Tank Bay, identifiable by the rusted remnants of a ships boiler, – long regarded by competition anglers as one of the most prolific spots for ragged tooth sharks on our coastline. The next spot well known spot after Tank bay is Coxes Rocks. This is the last section of rocks before a long beach starts that heads towards Fish River. Coxes Rocks is a very well-known Cob-spot. A few hundred meters to the left of the estuary month is a rocky outcrop known as second rocks. This spot is also great for Cob.

Fish River

One of the largest rivers in the Eastern Cape – this river holds very good cob, pig-nose and spotted grunter. Perhaps a feature of this river is that after good rains (inland), dirty water flows out on a low tide making the surf zone and adjacent rocks to the right known as “Fish River Point” brown in colour. Often the sea can be clean in colour on a high tide and then dirty on the low tide as the river water flows out to sea. Fish River point is arguably the best ragged -tooth shark spots on our coast as they feed in this dirty brown water. An array of other non-edible species can be caught here as well. The surf zone at Fish River is an excellent spot for Pig-nose grunter in the winter months and one should target them with a squid and sand prawn combination. Around the point is a long stretch of beach that is also good for cob and occasional baardman – there is usually good formation in front of the ‘old woman’s river’ – a blind river that runs through the Gary Player designed Golf Course at the Fish River mouth resort.

Common Species

Bronze Bream aka Hottentot, Bluefish, JB, Janbruin, Bronzies or Pens-en-Derm

The body is oval and bronze to brown in colour. The head is small with a bulge over the eyes. This is a slow growing fish that may exceed 30 years in age. Attains 65cm and the SA record is 7.05kg. The average weight caught by most anglers is around 2kgs.

The Bronze bream can be caught all year round; however, they are more predominant in the winter months of May to end of August due to the South Westerly winds that blow. These South Westerly winds tend to warm the sea up and create working white water where bluefish like to feed. In fact, the more working water the better, so don't be put off by a 'big sea'. They can be found in most gullies on the Ciskei and even off the beach where once casts towards rocky formation. Bronzies provide an awesome fight on light tackle. A light to medium 12ft rod coupled with a Daiwa sl30, Shimano 15/30 or any 8000 size coffee grinder will work perfectly. Hook size should range between a 1/0 – 3/0 and main line should be no more than 0.45mm or 30lb braid. A standard fixed trace usually does the trick however bluefish can be shy feeders and changing to a running sinker trace can often entice a bite. Pink prawns and sandprawns are a bluefish's favourite bait although they can be taken on redbait, crayfish and squid – the squid should be tenderised and made as soft as possible. When feeding, they can bite aggressively by either pulling the rod straight down or quickly bringing the bait in towards the angler – here your best bet is to reel in as quickly as possible and strike. It is very important to make the hook as 'proudly exposed' as possible so as not to miss a fish. A hook that is embedded in the bait will not penetrate the fish's mouth after one strikes. While targeting Bronzies – a host of other species can be caught on the same tackle and bait as well including Blacktail, Cob, Silver and Black Steenbras.



Blacktail aka Dassie, Kolstert or Ntimla

The Blacktail grows to around 45cm with a weight of over 3Kg. Sexual maturity is reached at around 16 cm. The SA angling record is 3.0kgs.



The Blacktail is a very popular fish that can be caught along the entire coast. A small silver panfish characterised by a black spot on its tail, they provide good fun on light tackle. Blacktail can be targeted from the rocks in and amongst reefs and in gully's. They feed on most bait but have a preference for pilchard. Being a relatively small fish they do not have big mouths and generally a 1/0 hook will suffice. Blacktail generally give a few rapid easily felt pulls while devouring your bait. The best way to hook these fish is to give them a bit of lead while they ingest their meal, then tighten up briskly but smoothly, and wind in continuously They are strong fighters for their size and are an ideal target species for

beginners. Blacktail are usually found in small shoals, so if one is hooked, there are more to catch. Many anglers believe a blacktail released after capture in the same gully where the shoal is feeding will lead the rest of the shoal away; these anglers may release unwanted fish in another area, or keep them in a tidal-pool until they have finished fishing. Small Blacktail make excellent live baits for predatory game fish including garrick, kob, ignoblis kingfish, large shad and offshore the couta (king mackerel) enjoys a blacktail snack. But remember the size restrictions. This fish is available all year round.

Blacktail trace with 3-way swivel



Cob aka Kob, Kabeljou, Inshore Kob

Cob grow to at least 1,8m and the SA angling record 82kgs.



Cob can be abundant along this part of the coast, all year round especially in the summer months and big ones in spring. They feed on sandbanks along the surf zones and anywhere where there is formation for them to hunt. An ever increasing method of targeting these fish is drop shot fishing. Here anglers throw artificial plastic lures on a leadhead jig using braided line to pop it off the bottom looking like a baitfish. Look for formation

where you can throw your lure onto a sandbank and retrieve it through a channel. Fishing with bait can be just as productive with squid being the most effective, although they will eat pilchard, octopus and prawns as well. Some anglers like to tie float to their hook to lift their bait off the bottom. Cob can also be caught while one is targeting pignose and bluefish, especially when one is using squid and sandprawn. A medium rod such as Shimano Technium or Poseidon Medium capable of throwing a 5-6oz sinker will be more than adequate. A Shimano Torium 20 or Daiwa Saltist 40 will pair up ideally with these rods. When it comes to dropshot fishing. A 10'6 rod of any brand coupled with a 4000/5000 grinder and 20lb braid will be ideal.



**Kob do not like steel traces, so rather use Fluorocarbon or nylon.
For musselcracker - Use 25kg FC Line Trace and 8/0 to 10/0 hook
For Steenbras - Use 2/0 to 4/0 hook
For smaller species such as Galjoen - Use 2/0 hook**

Pignose Grunter aka Piggy, White Steenbras, Steamer, River Steenbras, Varkbek or Varkie

The Piggy attains a maximum length of 140cm and a maximum weight of 30kgs. The SA angling record is 29.9kgs.



Endemic to South Africa, the White Steenbras are considered endangered. Stocks of this once plentiful fish has collapsed due to over-fishing by commercial fisheries using purse-seine nets (up to the 1980s, and trek-netting until this practice was banned in 2002). A popular fish in the winter months these fish are prized by anglers for their strong fight. They patrol the shallow channels of surf zones such as Hamburg Surf and Fish River Surf.

Available all year round, early morning or from the evening into dark are the better times to target these fish. Favoured baits include prawns, squid, octopus and pilchard. Good success has been had with a combination of squid and sandprawn. They are usually clean fighters however be careful when they are in the shallows as many a fish has been lost when the fish wants to go on its last run and one's drag is set to tight and the hooks pull out. Anglers like to use a "sly" hook when fishing for pignose which is a smaller second hook that is free running on the hook trace. The same rod and reel setup used for cob can be used to target this species.

Musselcracker aka Silver Steenbras, biskop, beenbek White Musselcracker or brusher

These are a very sought after species along the Ciskei coast. They inhabit the inshore region where they can be found around rocky coastlines as well as off sandy beaches.



The white musselcracker feeds on a variety of marine organisms including black mussels, white (sand mussels), ascidians (red bait / rooi-aas), crabs, crayfish, prawns, mud prawns, armadillo, abalone (Perlemoen), alikreuk. Their powerful jaws and specialised tooth structure copes with the hardest shell-fish easily. Sometimes they do feed on Sardine depending on the abundance of bait in the area.

White musselcracker grow to over 25 Kg in size – around 1 metre length, but most anglers catch smaller fish, mostly under 10 kg. Musselcracker, both white and black, have extremely strong jaws that are able to bend or break any but the strongest types of hooks.

There is little point in targeting these fish unless one is prepared to use the best quality, strongest and sharpest hooks available. The Brusher is generally found in rocky areas with a sandy bottom and white working water. They can also be found occasionally in clear water, but only during the early mornings or late afternoons as these fish tend to be shy feeders. Tackle to consider should be strong and up to the task of pulling him away from the rocks and gullies. A good reel with a good drag and a 12 to 14 foot rod is essential.

Your bait should look as natural as possible and use a running trace as they are shy feeders and will leave your bait if they feel any resistance, they normally take the bait and run to the open sea or head for the rocks hence the sharp hook although they sometimes come forward and if this happens you will have to reel quickly and set the hook but do not strike too hard as this might pull the hook right out of its mouth.

Lines should be between 0.45 to 0.55mm with a strong leader of around 0.7 or 0.8mm. Other terminal tackle like hooks and swivels should be strong as well. The preferred trace to use is as follows: An 8/0 hook (preferably a chemically sharpened), 0.8mm clear trace line. +/- 700mm (low water) or 900mm (high water), a power swivel, bead and ball sinker (3 or 4 oz). Same as the Poenskop.

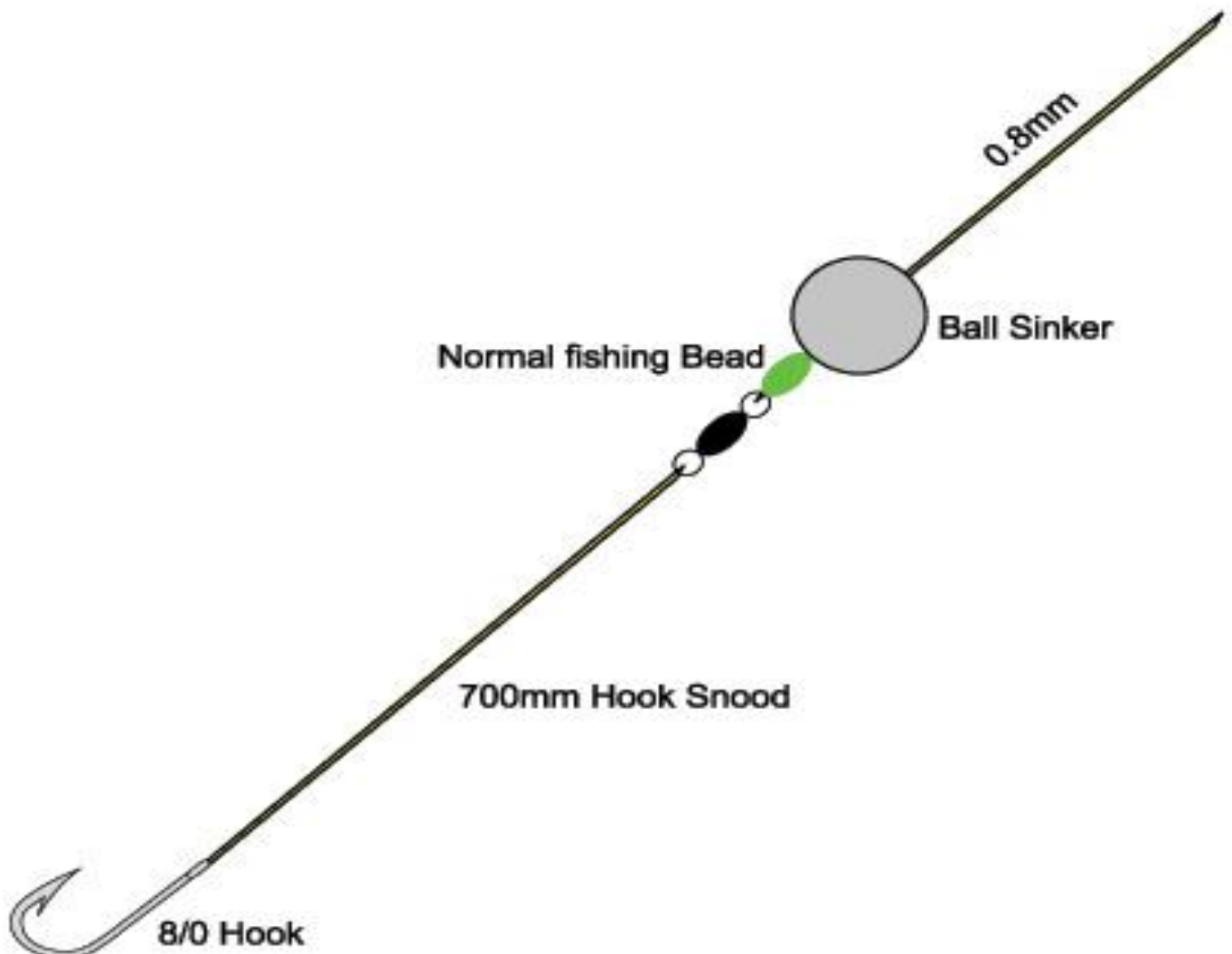
Poenskop aka Black, Black Musselcracker, Black Steenbras or Poenie,



This is not a common catch for rock and surf anglers. This fish is endemic to SA and is available all year round.

The Black Steenbras can grow up to 1,2 m and weigh 40kg's. It reaches a maximum age of 45years SA angling record is 36kg's.

Black Steenbras prefers baits such as octopus, squid, pilchard, mullet, crab and crayfish. They are often hooked while fishing for other smaller panfish providing an exhilarating fight on light tackle. They have extremely hard jaws that can bend hooks with the smallest of ease – so make sure you use a hook of a decent quality when targeting these fish. While they are caught on light tackle from time to time – these fish can be tacklebusters as they frequent very rocky areas where there is lots of reef, so make sure your tackle is up to standard, nothing less than 15kg mainline as well as a 28kg leader which provides abrasion resistance against the reefs.



Zebra aka Wildeperd, Bontdassie, Bontrok or Mbentsu

Zebra are available all year round It gets its name from the stripes it has on its body which resemble



a Zebra so it was named the Zebra Fish. The Zebra Fish is commonly caught by surf anglers and ski boat fisherman in gullies and rocky areas. The Zebra is known to grow to at least 50cm, probably more, and achieves 6 kg in weight. Zebra are fairly common around gullies and offshore reefs down to about 60m deep, but not as common as its blacktail cousin. Anglers can catch zebra using similar tackle and baits to that used for blacktail. The standard gully trace or light-tackle trace can be used to catch this fish.

Small sardine flesh baits, prawns, cracker shrimps, and mussel (flesh) baits work for zebra. Mussel worm and bloodworm are excellent baits for zebra.

The largest zebra caught by an angler in South Africa was 6.3 kg.

Ragged Tooth Sharks

The Ciskei coast is a breeding ground for these sharks and they are abundant after the east wind has blown which makes the water cold and dirty. Heavy terminal tackle should be used as fish of up to 200kg can be caught from the surf. Perhaps the most important aspect of raggie fishing is the trace and bait. The trace should be made up of a minimum of 120lb steel no shorter than 600mm in length – this steel prevents the teeth of the raggie from bighting the trace off. A good strong rod such as a Poseidon Heavy HMG or Blue Marlin 400/6 HMG coupled with a Shimano Torium 30 or Daiwa Saltist 50 and .50mm line will be able to handle these fish. Mullet and yellowtail tend to be the favoured baits although when feeding will eat any fish bait. On the low tide, one can wade and throw a bait over the dropoff into deeper water or one can target them in the holes and channels that fill up on the high tide. They have a characteristic bight where they bump you bait, pick it up and swim toward you before going away and pulling the rod down slowly – when the line starts to tighten strike a few times to set the hook. Care should be taken at all times when handling these fish as there are no hospitals in the area.



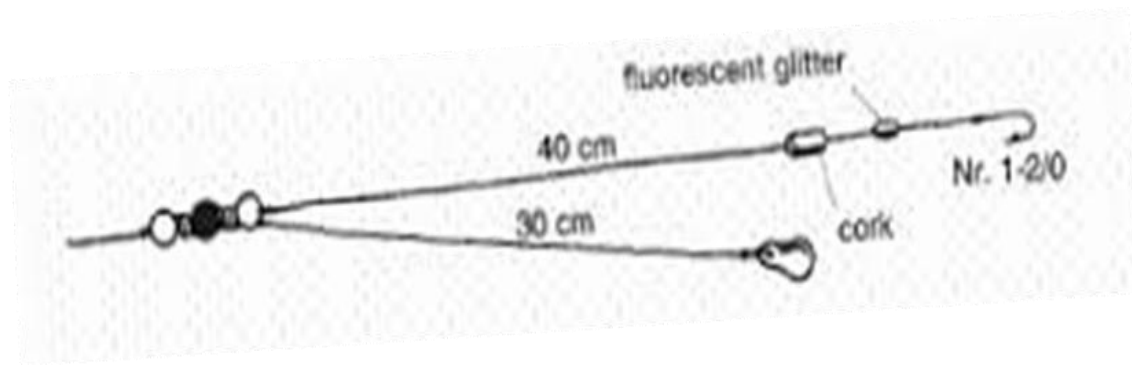
A raggie of 75kg caught in the Mpekweni surf



Another raggie caught at Mtana

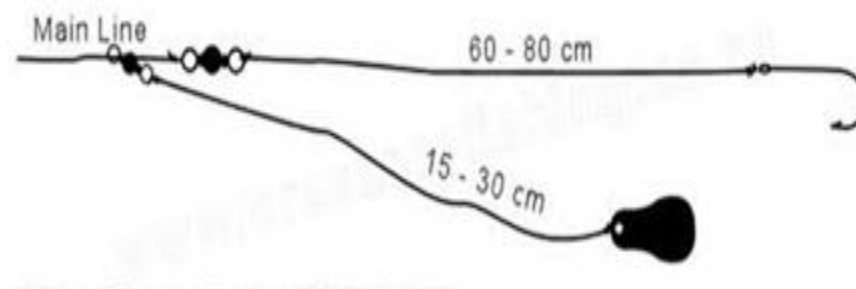
Good to know

How to make a fixed trace.



How to make a running trace.

Most anglers' favourite as the blue fish doesn't feel the sinker weight.



Bait

Pink prawn – peel the shell off the pink prawn then slice the prawn through the middle, not right through, just flap it, turn the meat inside out then put the hook through the wider side of the prawn then bind up with some cotton, add 2 prawns like this, this works very well, this bait is used mostly in cleaner water.



Sand prawn - lay 3 or 4 prawns on a hook and bind up with some cotton, this bait is more for cooler and water that's dirtier. You could also mix a pink prawn with 2 or 3 sand prawn, works wonders.



Squid or Chokka – Blob bait, clean your chokka skin and head off, cut a calamari ring +/- 1.5cm wide, split the ring that it now looks like a strip, beat the soft side of the chokka with a mallet till the chokka is nice and fluffy and still workable, then hook the chokka on the hook, hooking the softly beaten chokka in and out onto hook, when done hooking the chokka onto the hook, pull the chokka down that it's all firm on the hook, forming the blob, hence its name the blob bait. This bait also used in clean water as the white meat of the Chokka is seen by the fish.



Conditions

Area to fish for Bronze Bream or blue fish

Look for an area that is rolling creating nice foamy white water, known as working water. This area will produce you your bronze bream, look for the deepest part of the area , this will be a hole where the bronze bream will be in and feeding, BUT, also don't write the area around the hole off, the bronze bream also like the shallower spots. Try the whole area before moving on to another spot.



Barometric pressure - when there is a dramatic drop (e.g. 1015hpa to 990hpa) in barometric pressure indicating a storm is coming , or a sudden increase (e.g. 1015hpa to 1030hpa) in barometric pressure indicating heavy east wind , this is not good, if an angler checks the barometer before heading out to fish, one can almost predict the days angling, with the two situations above, your day will generally be very un-productive, as for some reason the fish become shy and don't feed, what you are really wanting in terms of barometric pressure is a stable pressure of around 1015 to 1020hpa, chances of good catches will be positive.

