

Whitianga, Coromandel **EPIG TRIP**

Editor Matt Hewetson went out in mid-autumn with Epic Adventures from Whitianga to target kingfish.

BY MATHEW HEWETSON / PHOTOS MATHEW HEWETSON AND SCOTT CUSHMAN

Fishing Location

WHITIANGA

The writer hooked up on a good kingie using the Saltiga and Jig Star combo.

EPIC CHARTERS

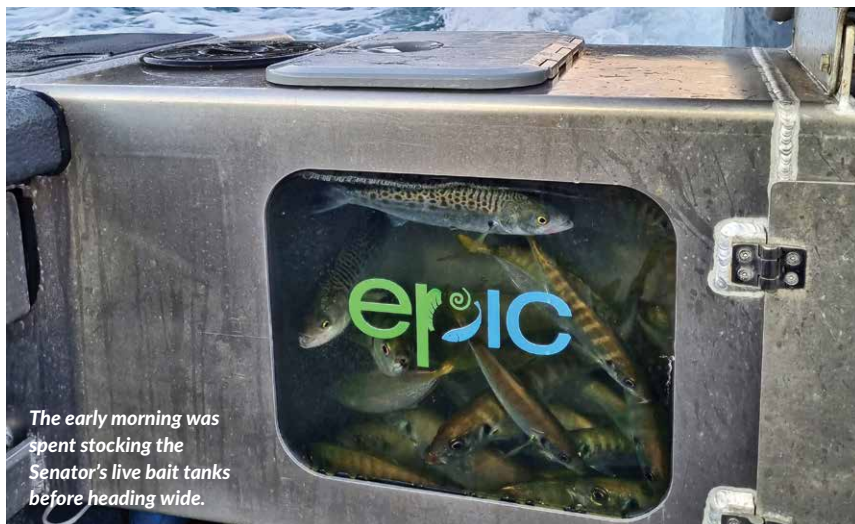


After enduring messy sea conditions off Cuvier Island, Kaos headed back to the Mercs.

Autumn is my favourite time of the of the year to get on the water and fish. The cooler mornings and calm weather can produce top fishing for all the favourite species, as the seasonal change signals time to feed up after the spring-summer spawning period.

I had organised a trip with Epic Adventures to head out and target kings on the eastern side of the Coromandel. The plan was to get out in early March and then another storm arrived, and we had to move the date to late March as 25 knot winds are not ideal for getting out and filming for a video and story.

It was the last Wednesday in March when I met up with Kaos skipper Owen Wills, who was tied up at the Whitianga wharf at 6:45am catching live baits in the dark. I have fished with Owen several times before on the trusty Senator pontoon 7m+ boats and he is one of Epic's most experienced skippers and his naturally laid-back personality makes



The early morning was spent stocking the Senator's live bait tanks before heading wide.

him a top captain to spend time on the water with. Owen has built up a lot of experience fishing off the Coromandel and always has a plan to help put his anglers onto fish.

We were going to be joined by Scott Cushman and Jack Halpin today to make up our fishing crew, and we all got to work helping fill the twin live bait tanks with mackerel and the odd small kahawai. Live baits are key to having a good day out on

the reefs out wide off the Coromandel and it wasn't long, and the tanks were stocked.

BAD WIND DIRECTION

As we left the harbour the morning forecast was for 13-17 knots and from the south-east which Owen commented is his least favourite direction and although it was looking to drop to only five knots in the afternoon, we were expecting to get sloppy conditions out wide.



Scott was all smiles after extracting his 15-16kg kingfish from the shallows at Cuvier.

The plan was to head north towards Cuvier Island and check the many pins and reefs along the way. The wind was picking up as we made the approximate hour-long ride in Kaos out to the first pin which had plenty of baitfish on the Simrad but not a lot of kingfish sign. Owen moved to another nearby spot, and it looked better, so I rigged up a Jig Star Torpedo 300gm jig while Scott and Jack sent down a mackerel. I hooked up immediately and landed a rat king while both Jack and Scott got interest in their livies which were stolen off the circle hooks.

Owen repositioned the Senator and with fresh live baits and my jig, we dropped back down to six line-colours as instructed by the skipper and I was into another small kingfish. Jack too was soon hooked-up and landed another rat kingfish which was released.

This was the fishing pattern over the early morning as we moved around the pins and several small kings were landed as we searched for bigger fish. The wind was now gusting well over 16 knots and making a messy swell with white



The big Yamaha 250hp gets a glowing endorsement from the skipper for reliability and economy.

caps, but the big Senator is such a good platform that you don't really notice while you fish. We were the only boat out fishing for miles so the forecast had put other boaties off and having fished before in these pontoon Senators, I can attest the boats are well suited for chartering in such average conditions where other boats would struggle.

Talking to Owen about the boat's great sea worthiness and all the outboards he has operated with, he could only talk with high praise for the Yamaha 250hp and its proven reliability when on the water. This provides confidence day in and out when running charters and helping put clients onto fish and getting a valuable experience.



"Jack and I took a Daiwa Saltiga and Jig Star combo each and lowered our mackerel just 2-line colours as Owen trolled slowly along and we were both instantly hooked up!"

Matt with a nice 11-12kg king that was released.



Skipper Owen waits patiently as Jack brings up another fish on the spin combo.



Jack scored the best snapper of the day which were constantly attacking the livies.

CUVIER SHALLOWS

Owen decided to head to Cuvier Island (Repanga) which is 15km north of the Mercury Islands and approximately 23km south-east of Great Barrier. We have fished here before and the area has extensive reefs with good snapper and kingfish. Owen planned to go in close to slow troll live baits and get out of the messy conditions for a while.

We arrived and set to putting two mackerels out and down 3-line colours as Owen moved in close and positioned Kaos on a slow troll. There were huge schools of maomao, kahawai and trevally and the place screamed predators here. As we came to the end of the island, Scott had a good hit, and the fish took off as he yelled out and Owen gunned it out towards deeper water. We all hung on and Scott did well to balance and keep his

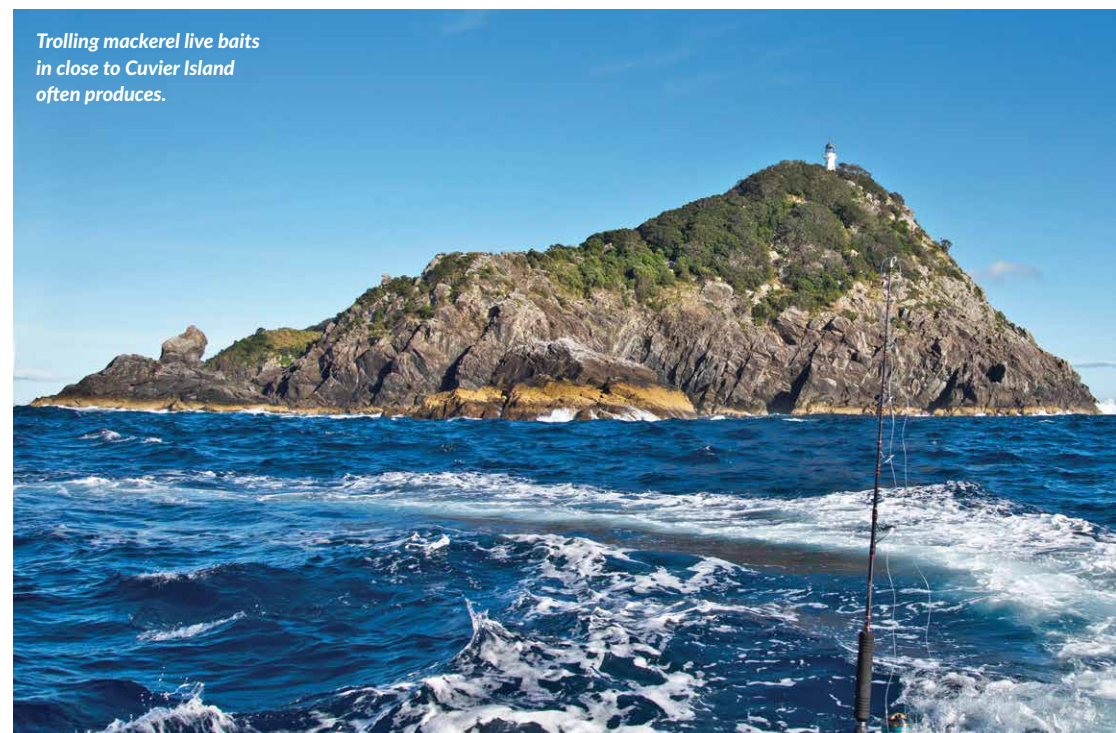
thumb on the spool to help drag the fish into deeper water.

The kingfish had other plans as it tried to head back to the reef and Scott had to crank hard and fast, keeping its head up and with a bit of luck it swam out where he could fight it better. Owen warned him not to take too long as sharks had been a constant problem recently. The fish soon tired after such pressure and Owen boated it, with a few quick photos and it was kept for the smoker.

We tried several more trolls here but didn't get any more takes so we headed back towards the Mercs to try the shallows there and we got a bit beat up as we had to go directly into the south-east swell and chop that had built up over the past couple of hours.

Back at the Mercs and in the shelter of the islands it was much nicer, and Owen's

Trolling mackerel live baits in close to Cuvier Island often produces.



sounder showed plenty of sign in under 15m and he advised to drop into the reef and get ready. Jack and I took a Daiwa Saltiga and Jig Star combo each and lowered our mackerel just 2-line colours as Owen trolled slowly along and we were both instantly hooked up! Scott filmed the action on the Go-Pro while we set to catching fish.

Jack soon had a rat king up and released it, while my fish proved a bit stroppy and after a good fight a nice 10-11kg fish was also on ice for the smoker. We dropped more livies over the side and they were getting hit quickly by snapper which were welcomed for the fish bin.

Over the next hour and a half our live bait supply was quickly depleted by the

ravenous snapper and I managed to score another 11-12kg kingfish which we released, and Scott landed a nice John dory which made our bin healthy with a good bag of fish.

It was just after 3pm when we headed back in to Whitianga, and the wind was dying as forecast. We transferred the fish to the Triton and said our good-byes to Owen, thanking him for the great day in challenging conditions and valued his constant effort on the helm to put us onto fish. As we drove away and up into the hills before Tairua, the sea was looking calm and stunning as the conditions had changed just like that. It made us want to turn around and go back, fishing off the Coromandel certainly keeps you keen. **FIGZ**

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