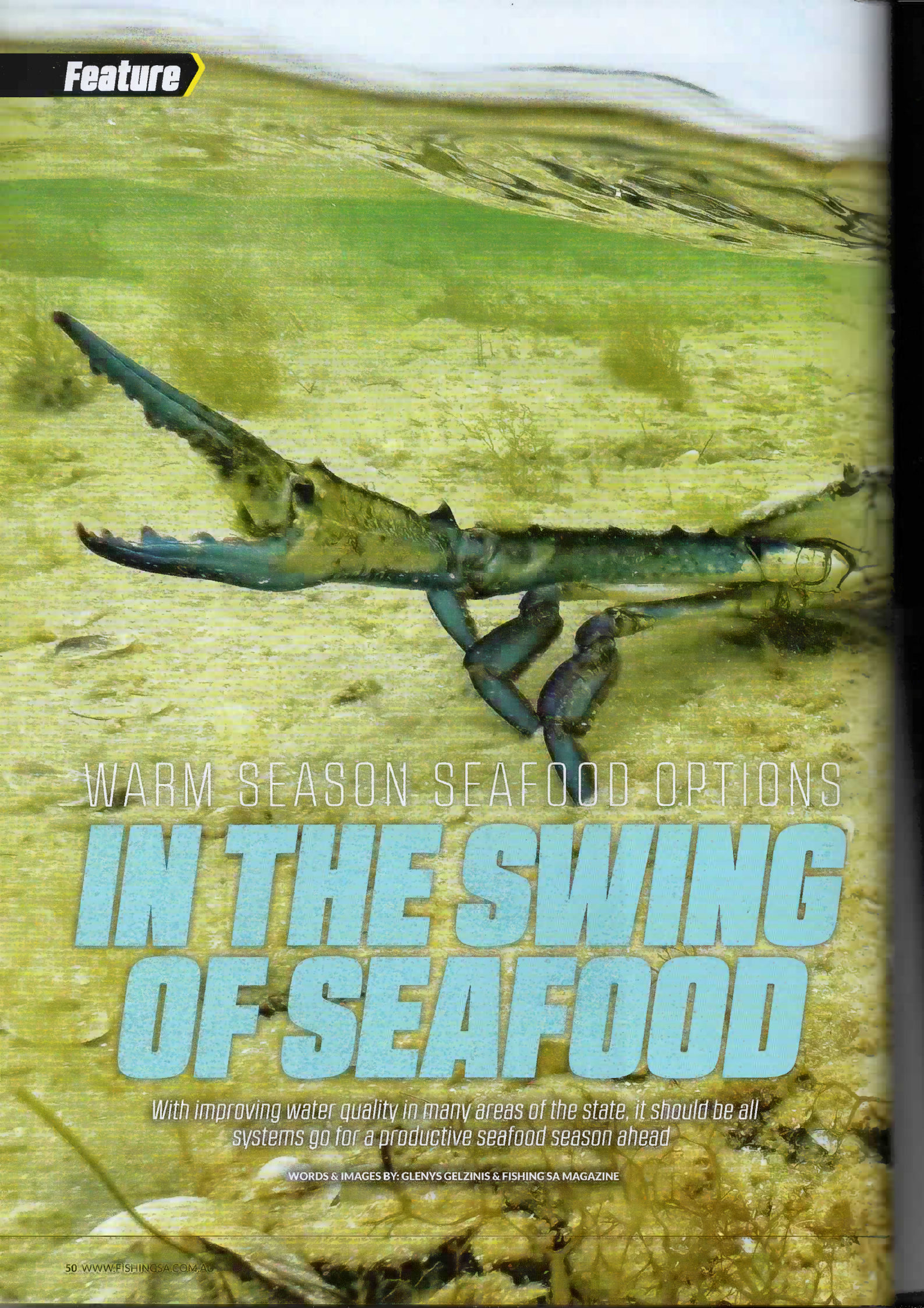


A large crayfish, likely a European crayfish, is shown on a sandy beach. The crayfish is dark green and blue, with its long antennae and legs spread out. In the background, the ocean waves are breaking onto the shore, creating a white foam. The overall scene is a natural, coastal environment.

WARM SEASON SEAFOOD OPTIONS **IN THE SWING OF SEAFOOD**

With improving water quality in many areas of the state, it should be all systems go for a productive seafood season ahead

WORDS & IMAGES BY: GLENYS GELZINIS & FISHING SA MAGAZINE



With the harmful algae bloom showing signs of backing off considerably in certain areas of the

state. To the point where hopefully it's business as usual on the fishing front at many popular locations, collecting and eating seafood will once again be back on the radar for many.

No doubt there will be an increased focus on targeting our amazing seafood species again over the warmer months ahead. While the hit list will be somewhat reduced, with garfish

and squid restrictions still in place for some areas at the time of writing, there remains the opportunity to catch and sample the many other fruits of our waters.

It's also a great time to expand your thinking around the species you can catch and eat, and how to get the most from them, given the changing circumstances. Necessity is the mother of invention after all, as they say!

Below are a few tips for making the most of your seafood catches, and what to avoid when it comes to preparing your seafood dishes. But before jumping into the options and how to cook them, let's look at getting the basics in order first to ensure the best possible result on the dinner plate.

Is there anything better than fresh caught local fish?!

CATCH CARE

Naturally we can all be a bit rusty on this front, and unprepared for when we are suddenly confronted with a haul of quality tucker from the ocean. Getting the most from what you catch and collect on the dinner plate all begins with how you care for it initially.

From the point of capture until you get it on the cleaning table is often done remotely from your home and will require pre-planning before you fish. Having the right tools on hand is the first step, and this needs to involve having the appropriate measuring devices, be it fish rulers or crab measurers etc. You just can't wing it and fill your boots on location without regular size checks.

Further to this have your phone on you



"With a solid bedrock of preparation and attention to detail where possible, you'll be serving your family and friends prime seafood to be proud of, and not second-rate rubbish that tastes like an old sock"

for guidance with size, bag and boat limits, and even screen shot these before you leave if you're out of phone range.

Bringing appropriate knives, scalers and/or scaling bags with you is another prerequisite. Even pack a large chopping board if there's scope to clean your catch on location, or use the bait board in your boat. It's a lot less fuss to clean your catch at the water edge than in your backyard where possible, and having a dead flat surface makes the job easier. There's even collapsible chopping boards for land-based fishos after a space-saving option.

For species like sharks and bigger tuna for example, you'll need a larger knife on

hand to deal with the size of cuts required, and your thin filleting knife just won't cut it (pun intended!).

Correct storage of your catch is paramount, and will ultimately dictate the quality of the food you're eating, and even prevent potential illness if your catch spoils. Keeping your catch cool and out of direct sunlight is crucial. Whether you keep it alive in a livebait tank, a bucket of seawater with a lid on it, or ideally in a cooler with ice, you need a gameplan.

Some species like crabs are best kept alive, given their fickle eating qualities if they die prematurely, and potential for illness to result if they've spoiled. If they're alive you know



they're in the best possible shape to cook. Other fish may need bleeding or prompt removal of stomach and fins to get the best from them, before icing down.

Ike jime techniques can also be used on many species, essentially brain spiking them for quick death, to further enhance their edibility. There's a lot of people that swear by this, even on fish like snapper and smaller species, not just tuna and the big stuff.

When it comes time to cleaning your catch, be sure to have a flat, relatively hygienic area to

do so. You may also want some seawater on hand to wash the fillets and area, versus using freshwater. Some believe it makes a huge difference with the final taste.

Keep your fillets and fish out of the sun as much as possible at this point, as you don't want to ruin the result at the eleventh hour. Then promptly package for freezing or refrigeration.

With a solid bedrock of preparation and attention to detail where possible, you'll be serving your family and friends



prime seafood to be proud of, and not second-rate rubbish that tastes like an old sock.

Now over to our resident cook Glenys to run you through a bunch of options. Some downright easy and tasty, while others are more creative and may just trigger some new thinking.

SEAFOOD COOKING TECHNIQUES

When it comes to cooking local seafood, what you catch in most instances will be your guide as to the best way to cook

it. Whether you can cook the fish whole or filleted, use bold flavours or more subtle ones, all depends on the type of fish and what the best cooking method will be to savour the taste.

With more delicate, mild tasting and fine flaking fish it pays to keep ingredients simple in most cases. Using a few standard seasonings like lemon juice, olive oil and fresh herbs like dill, parsley, thyme, chives and tarragon.

Light and quick cooking techniques are best to retain



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Picking blue crab meat is tedious work, but worth it!



the flavour and texture of thinner type fish, whereas for the more chunky white flesh fish you can experiment a bit more with flavourings and cooking techniques.

Crabs are very versatile and lend themselves to a variety of dishes. From enjoying them cooked whole in the shell to picking the meat and using it in a number of ways. So let's examine the options and how to turn them into a seafood feast.

CREATIVE WITH CRABS

Blue swimmers should be back

on the menu in many areas, and a strong run of crabs was experienced at the back end of last season, and the year has started strongly so far.

The meat of the blue swimmer crab, and similarly sand crabs, is such a useful ingredient in cooking because of its sweet non overpowering flavour and firm texture. It can be used as an ingredient in breakfast dishes like omelettes and scrambled eggs, for lunches and light meals in salads and sandwiches when mixed with mayonnaise. Right through to

mains in pasta dishes and more.

To pick the meat from blue swimmer crabs, you first need to cook the crabs. The best way to retain their fresh and sweet flavour is to steam them in a shallow pot of seawater. Steam them with the pot lid on, just long enough for the shells to turn from blue to red, then drain and refrigerate them to cool quickly. Or plunge into an ice bath, and stop the cooking process. Keep an eye on them when they're steaming so as they don't overcook, which will cause the flesh to turn mushy.

Once they're cooled you can pick the meat from the body and legs using special crab picking tools, including a crab shell cracker and forks to dig the meat out. When cracking crab shells be careful not to crush the shell too much or you'll risk getting shell fragments mixed in with the crab meat.

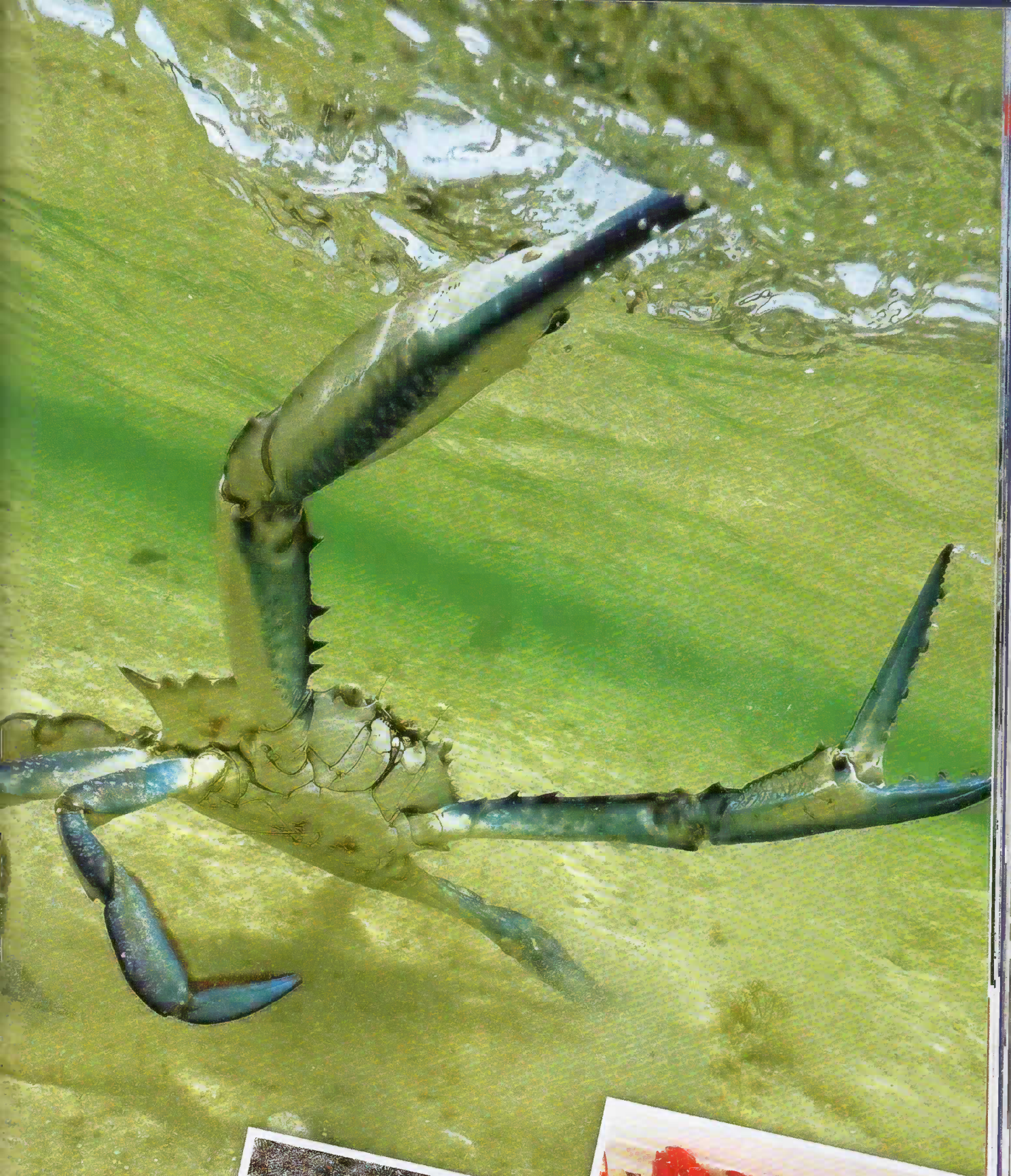
Crab meat goes well in pasta dishes using linguine or spaghetti, and adding flavours such as chilli, lemon zest, cherry tomatoes, white wine and herbs. You can also use crab meat mixed with ricotta to fill homemade ravioli, or stuffed in large pasta shells and cook in either a creamy or tomato based sauce.

Other ways to enjoy the delicate crab flavour is in Asian style dishes, such as crab and corn fritters or dumplings, where minimal other flavours are added and cooking methods are quick.

If you like to eat your crab straight from the shell, one of the simplest whole crab recipes is for chilli crab. Simply place cleaned crab in a shallow frying pan or wok with a little peanut or rice bran oil and toss around with flavourings such as garlic, ginger, spring onions and a chilli sauce to suit your taste, until the crab shell has changed colour to red. All it takes is

Chilli crab is easy and super tasty





Having a cooler filled with ice at the ready for your crab catch makes sense





A fish curry is perfect for white chunks of flesh

a few short minutes to cook this way, and it makes a great (if not messy) dish to serve for a crowd. Serve chilli crab, preferably outdoors, with crab eating tools and water for hand washing nearby.

All in all, from pickling through to more elaborate dishes, crabs are very versatile!

MEATY WHITE FISH

The trick for cooking any fish so that you retain moisture and prevent overcooking and drying out, is to cook it until it just goes from translucent to opaque.

For thicker and flakier meaty fish varieties such as mullet, flathead and shark you can use

fillets in saucier dishes like a mornay, and curries, as they hold together well during the cooking process, and sauces keep them from drying out.

These varieties both taste great when lightly battered and deep fried quickly in hot oil until golden and crispy, or lightly coated in seasoned flour and pan fried in butter.

Varieties of lean (non-oily) fish including whiting and bream, can all be grilled and baked as well. But to protect them from drying out they should be baked with oil or butter during cooking.



Baked fish

Another method to retain moisture when cooking these types of fish is to wrap them in an envelope of baking paper prior to baking or grilling, and they'll steam in their own juices. You can add butter, lemon, herbs and thinly sliced vegetables to add flavour before wrapping.

Firm white fish also holds up well in a fish pie with a rich creamy white sauce that prevents the fish from drying out, and also in Asian stir fries. When the fish is cubed and fried in this quick way it keeps its firmness and moisture. You can certainly get imaginative

with many species that suit this cooking!

SMALL BUT TASTY

The smaller varieties of fish like mullet, salmon trout, trevally and tommies are oilier fish and can be quite strong in flavour. Generally the darker the flesh of the fish, the oilier it is and these types of fish are best when grilled, barbecued, baked and smoked, as the oils prevent the fish from drying out as quickly. Thankfully all these species remain quite prolific in many areas and are an easy source of seafood for many. Don't let their size fool you,



Fish pie is an easy way to utilise chunky white fleshed species

they offer a lot of flavour in a small package!

All these fish come up really well when they're smoked. These are best prepared by leaving the whole gutted fish to soak in a brine mixture of water, brown sugar, salt, garlic and herbs for a few hours or overnight. Prior to smoking remove them from the brine solution and pat dry, then smoke until the fish are golden and the flesh cooked inside.

Other flavours that pair well with oily fish and balance out the oils, are tangy citrus and vinegar marinades, which you can use prior to cooking the fish. You can marinate them in a lemon juice, olive oil, garlic and red wine vinegar mix, which can also be used to baste the fish while cooking.

Stuffing whole oily fish with flavours like lemon, garlic, red onion and dill also works well and helps to retain moisture when they're baked or barbecued.

Oily fish also lend themselves to preserving in a pickling solution, and can be eaten after a few days of curing, with rye bread, sliced red onion and dill pickles.

THE LESSER USED VARIETIES

Utilising alternative species, and not necessarily frontline targets or those with the highest profile, has been a theme over the last few years,

with bag limit reductions, and species heavily impacted with the HAB event. Luckily we're blessed with a bunch of 'second string' species that cook up amazingly well.

For some types of fish it's all about how the fish is prepared as soon as it's caught that will play a big part in whether they'll come up well in recipes. One of those fish is Australian salmon, which are great fun to catch, but if you're planning on keeping these high oil content fish for eating, then you have to kill and bleed them immediately. Keeping them as fresh as possible is key as well. So putting them in a slurry of ice and saltwater once they've been bled is also necessary.

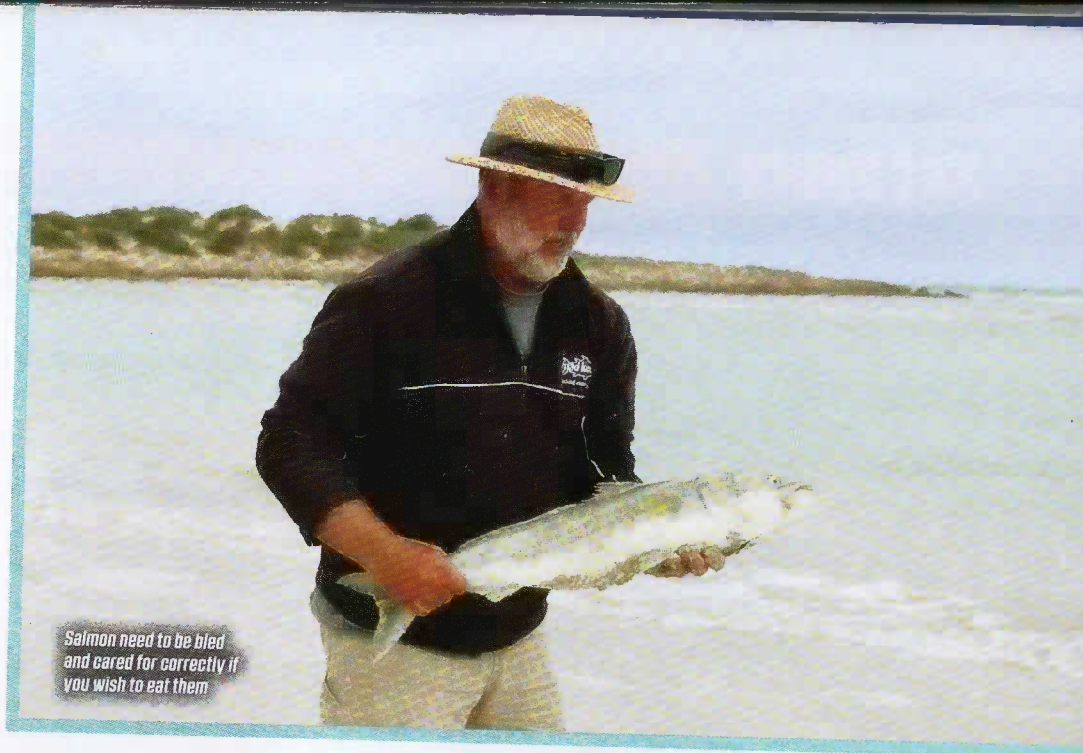
Salmon has a strong oily flavour which means it can be paired with other strong flavours like tomatoes, olives, onion, garlic, capers and citrus. As well as strong herbs including dill, rosemary and thyme, which can be used to stuff and bake these fish.

You can also use them in curries with stronger flavourings, or incorporate them into fish patties where other flavours can balance out the strong taste of the fish. Use the lighter part of the meat if you find Australian salmon too fishy tasting.

Snook, leatherjackets, sweep and flounder are other species that are sometimes overlooked as table fish, but once they've

been prepared correctly, these fish can be cooked in a number of ways including frying, grilled or in mild curries. Snook are unbelievable when smoked. All of these varieties have mild tasting, subtle and sweet flesh so they respond well to light and quick cooking so that they aren't overpowered or dry out.

So with the weather warming, and our waters starting to come alive with fishy options, there's no better time to get ready for the seafood season ahead. We're sure fishos will be appreciating every fresh fish meal that bit more going forward, and be back in the swing of collecting and eating it in no time. After all, there's nothing tastier in our opinion! **FSA**



Salmon need to be bled and cared for correctly if you wish to eat them



Brined fish ready for the smoker. Left: The end result