

Story By

PELAGIC CHASER

Darryl Lindeman

USING SOFT PLASTICS (Part 1 TACKLE)

Fishing with soft plastics has become a very popular style of fishing over the past couple of years although soft plastics have been around for over 30 years. Today I am going to go through some of the fundamentals of fishing with soft plastics from rigging them correctly to some of the different casting methods used. There is no right or wrong way to use soft plastics but there are ways to enhance your chance of catching fish. There are literally thousands of combinations of colour, style, and head size that can be incorporated in using soft plastics so which one is right and when. Just remember that fishing soft plastics is only one way of fishing and, in the beginning, will probably be the most frustrating thing you will do but once you start to master it and start getting some results it can also be the most exhilarating and addictive thing you do.

Tackle

Rods

To use soft plastics you are going to need the right style of gear to go with your softies and this starts with the rod you are using. Most jig heads you use around the creeks and rivers or out in the fresh water are going to be light to very light with ¼ ounce being probably the heaviest you will use and going right down to totally unweighted jig heads so using a broomstick with 50lb on it will just not work. The rod needs to have a sensitive tip but still have some power in the rod to be able to stop the fish from getting you in to the snag, rock, weed etc. A quick run down on the rod would be that it has to be lightweight and have reasonable quality runners, be around 6ft in length and feels comfortable in your hand. The cast ability of the rod will determine how far and how accurate you can land your soft plastic in the right location. There are plenty of rod manufacturers with specific rods for this style of fishing but you don't have to pay the earth for them.

Reels

The reel you use will have to have a good drag system be light weight have a large bail roller and hold adequate amount of line for what you are doing. Any brand of reel in the eggbeater style of around the 1000 – 2000 size should meet these needs. They are quite inexpensive and should do the job nicely. If you prefer overheads then they also have a large range of makes and models that will suit your needs.

Mainline

With today's technology there are gel spun's like Fireline or any number of braided lines as well as low stretch monofilament and all the old favourites so what do you choose. Something that is soft and supple is the way to go. I prefer to use pretest line in either 1kg or 2kg but most anglers casting soft plastics are using either gel spun or braid in the 4lb – 6lb weight. Try not to use any line that has a memory, as this will not allow for accuracy or distance in casting and can even affect the swim of the soft plastic. If you prefer to use the gel spun or braid make sure to wash the line well after each trip as salt will intrude into the line and can lead to problems later on.

Leaders

Leaders are a must with this style of fishing if using the gel spun or braid choices for a couple of major reasons. The first is that braid and gel spun are both very visible in the water and they are also quite hard to tie knots in compared to monofilament. Keep the leaders relatively short and light in breaking strain using something to 10lb will, in most cases, be more than sufficient.

Other Bits and Pieces

The first thing you need is a worm proof tackle tray as soft plastics will quickly “eat” their way through normal plastic tackle boxes or plastic hook boxes that they come in to contact with. Never mix colours of plastics in the same tray, as they will leach into each other. Other things to carry are a small pair of scissors or cutters, a hone to keep your hooks sharp, extra leader material, a knife and some scent. (this last is personal choice)

Jigs and Plastics

There are literally thousands of different combinations of jig head style and weight and plastic style and colour so don't get caught out with the hype and load yourself up with all of them as you will only confuse yourself and keep the tackle shop rich and yourself poor. My preference would be to have some ¼ ounce heads for bouncing the bottom some 1/8-ounce for sub surface to mid-water and some unweighted heads to work the surface. On the plastics front I would look at having some paddle tails, shads vibro tails and flick baits in a couple of colours and sizes. Once you start getting into this form of fishing you will learn what works and what doesn't and your soft plastic selection will grow accordingly. A good rule of thumb is light colours on light days and dark colours on dark days or at night.

For more on this or any other style of fishing why not contact our club on 0408848564 or drop us an email at kevinc@bundysportfishing.com.au.

Darryl Lindeman
Bundaberg Sport Fishing Club inc

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USING SOFT PLASTICS (Part 2 Rigging, Casting and Retrieving)

Moving on from last weeks article where I talked about the tackle requirements for this style of fishing this week I will conclude with how to rig your soft plastics and the techniques used in casting and retrieving them.

Rigging

Rigging your Soft Plastic (weighted)

This is the most important part of using soft plastics and time should be taken to ensure you do it right. All soft plastics have an up side and a belly side and making sure the hook is embedded in the plastic properly will ensure that it swims correctly and imparts the best action. Before impaling the plastic on the hook hold the hook on the topside of the plastic to give an indication of where the hook point should protrude out of it then working the plastic on to the hook pick that point to exit it. This will allow the plastic to sit naturally rather than be “bent” either up or down on the hook. Ensure you exit the plastic directly in the middle of the back to ensure that the finished product does not spin but swims correctly. If you got it wrong START again don't think that close enough is good enough because it isn't.

Rigging your Soft Plastic (unweighted)

Specific hooks are required for weedless unweighted soft plastics. These are readily available from any number of tackle stores. They have a kink in the eye end of the hook and normally look like a wide gap hook. Feed only the very start of the soft plastic onto the hook and bring the point out of the bottom of the

plastic and push the plastic completely up to the kink in the hook now rotate the hook 180 degrees and lay it along the bottom of the plastic to see where the hook should re-enter the bait. Now bend the soft plastic back toward the hook eye to insert the point in the right location then slide the hook in till the point almost comes out of the top side of the plastic. This makes the plastic almost completely snag proof and is ideal for working around weed beds and relatively heavy timbered areas.

Casting and Retrieving

Straight Retrieve

The straight retrieve is exactly that, you cast out and start winding in to keep the plastic working near the surface or wait a number of seconds to allow the plastic to sink a bit and then wind in at a constant speed to keep the plastic at that depth. This is best suited to those plastics with a lot of action in the tail and it is this action that you are hoping to attract the fish.

Slow Jerk

The slow jerk retrieve is more of a stop and start approach to your retrieve where you use the rod in an arcing motion to retrieve the plastic and then wind in the slack as you bring the rod tip back to start all over again. This start stop approach can also be used in all but the uppermost section of water. Better suited to those tails that have a little less action but will drop away as you retrieve giving them the extra action they need to attract fish.

Double Jerk

The double jerk is similar to the slow jerk but on each retrieve of the rod you stop and pause momentarily to allow the plastic to fall away from its general pattern of swim. This retrieve pattern is best suited to those tails that have either no action or very little action of their own.

Bottom Bounce

The bottom bounce is used primarily for flathead and consists of a slightly heavier head that will allow the plastic to stay in touch with the bottom easier. Cast out and let the plastic sit on the bottom for several seconds and then, using quite a violent strike of the rod tip bounce the plastic to a new location on the bottom and once again leave it for several seconds before going through the same motion again, retrieve the slack line between each motion to allow you to keep in touch with any subtle bight you might get.

Twitch

Best used when drifting this technique is similar to bottom bouncing except that you do not have to retrieve as you are drifting away from the plastic which will keep you in touch with any bights. For best results try casting toward the shoreline and twitch the plastic until it has moved in to line with the boat and then move to the bottom bounce technique.

These are the main techniques used for soft plastics and although there are many variations on these they are the mainstay.

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