

ONE STEPTOE AHEAD

WORDS BY ANDREW MAYO

PHOTOS BY ANDREW MAYO & WARREN STEPTOE



In 2015, after 31 years as one of Australia's most prominent and prolific fishing and boating writers, Warren Steptoe retired. Unsurprisingly, he's quite content to be on the other side of the camera, deadline-free and to fish for the pure fun of it. Incidentally, that 4.5m Haines Traveller is still doing everything Steptoe hoped for when he designed it 13 years ago with the Haines Group.



The fish that started it all – Australian bass. There are few things Steptoe loves more.

For more than three decades, Warren Steptoe has been one of Australia's most prolific and highly regarded fishing and boating writers. In this special feature, Andrew Mayo shines the spotlight on the career and contributions of a man who has inspired and influenced so many.

Have you noticed something a little different about **FishLife** in the last 18 months, but haven't quite been able to put a finger on it? Perhaps you've had a niggling feeling that something was missing? Well, you'd be dead right. However, that missing 'something' was in fact *someone* – Warren Steptoe.

In 2015, after 31 years as a fulltime freelance writer and photographer, Warren retired, leaving behind the relentless deadlines, the stress and the strain, and moved from Brisbane to the NSW north coast with his wife, Mary. As you'd expect from a bloke who doesn't care much for fuss and fanfare, Warren quietly called 'time' and exited stage left, with barely so much as a nod or a wink goodbye.

Unsurprisingly, it was with considerable reluctance that Warren agreed to this article. Clearly I was keener on the idea than he was. I was pretty sure, however, that a fair chunk of this magazine's readership would like to thank Warren for a job well done, wish him all the best and join me in re-tracing a fascinating, criss-crossing path of Aussie sport fishing history.

Dream Days

If you picked up a fishing magazine anytime between the early '80s and 2015, you'd be familiar with Warren Steptoe's work. It's fair to say that few fishing and boating writers have been as prolific or consistently generated more diverse content over the last three decades. While Warren wrote for

most of the major fishing publications (including this one) during his career, it was his 27-year stint as a senior contributor and columnist with *Modern Fishing* that burns brightest for most.

Like the West Indies cricket team in the '80s and '90s, the *Modern Fishing* line-up was a formidable one in its day: McCristal, Lewers, Mondora, Starling, Booth, Dundon, Ashley, Pepperell, Mensforth, Donald, Miller, Busch, Killip, Finney... The list goes on. And in amongst it all, Steptoe was very much front and centre.

His popular 'Sunshine Connection' column, the brainchild of then-editor Peter Horrobin, was always frank, fearless and entertaining – even if you weren't a Queenslander. And there weren't many months when there wasn't a Steptoe by-

line in the features list and boating section of the magazine as well. Testament to Warren's dogged determination and staying power, he outlasted five editors (including me) during his memorable association with *Modern Fishing*.

Warren's sheer volume of published material goes a long way towards explaining how he managed to earn a living from words and pictures. Believe me, it's no mean feat. From the outside looking in, the life of a freelance fishing writer is a dream existence. The reality, of course, is quite different.

Australia simply doesn't have the population, the market nor the associated dollars to sustain the pay rates required to make fishing writing a viable fulltime career on its own – especially when you consider the time and travel costs associated with continually generating new material. And yet Warren defied the odds for 31 years, with minimal industry support, largely due to his work in the boating media (and supplemented with a few shifts at Jones's Tackle in Brisbane during the early '90s).

What's even more astounding, and largely unknown to many, is that Warren was a single parent for 10 years – 'Mr Mum', as he jokingly referred to himself – raising two boys, David and John, on his own. Clearly there's a lot more to the man than people realise. But we're getting a



A classic Steptoe 'portrait' of a lovely Cape York saratoga.

little ahead of ourselves. Let's go back to where it all started.

Bikes, Bass And A Marlin

Born in 1950, Warren grew up in Lismore, in the beautiful Northern Rivers region of NSW. A keen angler from a young age, Steptoe cut his teeth on bass in the creeks and tributaries of the

Richmond and Wilsons Rivers. As a teenager, he'd regularly hop on his treadle, glass pistol-grip rod and closed face reel in hand, and pedal to the productive bass waters of Woodlawn, Wyrallah or Boatharbour.

Interestingly, many of those early '60s bass fishing forays were catch-and-release affairs. In an era when 'perch' were often knocked on the



Warren enjoys messing about in canoes, too. That's long-time mate, Steve Watson, up the front eyeing off the next snag.



Blast from the past. A snapshot of early Steptoe stories from Fishing World and Modern Fishing in the '70s and '80s.



By the time the '90s rolled around, Steptoe stories about Cape York, Moreton Bay longtails and wilderness canoe expeditions were popular fare in Modern Fishing.



Catch-and-release fishing, Cape York mountain bike adventures and impoundment natives were ever-present themes over the years. By the late '90s, the job of chief fish holder often fell to Mary O'Neil.

head for the family dinner table, it's unlikely that many teenagers up and down the coast had quite the same conservation ethic. Then again, perhaps they didn't live in towns as hilly as Lismore. Honourable intentions aside, Warren concedes that one of the motivations for releasing bass was to avoid negotiating Lismore's steep streets with a bulging sack of fish dangling from his handlebars!

In addition to harassing the local bass population, Steptoe spent plenty of time on the north coast rocks and beaches chasing tailor, bream and mulloway. While at high school, he graduated to live baiting for Spanish mackerel and longtail tuna from Ballina's South Wall, at the mouth of the Richmond River. Tackle *de rigueur* for this caper was a seven-inch, cedar-spool Alvey filled with 1000m of 30lb Tortue and a Sportex 3904 rod. By the time he was 15 or 16, Warren had caught some impressive pelagics off the wall on his drag-less Alvey, including a few lumpy longtails and a couple of hefty Spanish macks around the old-fashioned 50lb mark. To be fair, the Alvey *did* have an auxiliary drag system of sorts – it involved palming the whirling spool, preferably with a wet terry-toweling hat or a mate's t-shirt!

In 1967, before he was old enough to buy a celebratory beer, Steptoe hooked and landed the holy grail of east coast land-based game fishing – a marlin – from the breakwall. Chatting about that memorable capture 50 years later, Warren admits to being a little underwhelmed by his first billfish encounter (it didn't pull as hard as a big longtail or Spaniard, apparently). Nevertheless, the 'Breakwall-Marlin-on-Alvey Club' remains one of the more exclusive angling groups in the country!

It was also during those formative, early teenage years that Warren first met the late, great Vic McCristal, the man acknowledged by many as the founding father of outdoor writing and sport fishing in Australia. Meeting 'Mr McCristal', as Warren knew him then, was a big deal for a fishing-mad youngster. Already a high profile writer, Vic's articles in *Australian Outdoors* magazine appealed immensely to a teenage Steptoe's sense of adventure and latent wanderlust, as they did to an entire generation of young (and not so young) anglers.

For Warren, that meeting – in a Lismore corner store next to his parents' petrol station – proved more influential on his life path than he realised. It also planted the seed for a lasting friendship that developed in later years through the pair's involvement in the Australian Outdoor Writers Association (AOWA) and the Australian National Sportfishing Association (ANSA), both of which Vic was fundamental in establishing.

Northern Exposure

In amongst the bass, bikes and marlin, Warren left school, knuckled down and completed a panel beating apprenticeship. At the same time, a passion for motor racing emerged which saw him

on the cusp of a professional driving career, and culminated in a position on the starting grid at the famous Bathurst 1000 race during the early '70s...But that's *another* story entirely! That passion did, however, provide the catalyst for a move to Weipa, on western Cape York, to work in the town's bauxite mine for a year and save some cash. And to get stuck into a few barra, of course!

From all accounts, the barra fishing in Weipa is still going strong, but the mind boggles at the thought of what it was like 40-odd years ago before the netting kicked off. According to Steptoe, it was pretty good: "Good enough for a bass fisherman with a bit of experience chasing river jew to be straight into them," he wrote in his 1993 *Modern Fishing* article, 'Cape York Capers – Part 3'. Suffice to say, there can't have been too many better places for a young bloke to do a tropical sport fishing apprenticeship than Weipa in the 1970s.

Unsurprisingly, Warren caught and learnt a hell of a lot during his year living in the red dust on western Cape York. While Weipa was

probably always destined to end up in the sport fishing limelight, Steptoe certainly played a significant role in planting it firmly on the angling map during his career, as did his good mate, writer and fishing guide Dave Donald.

After the Cape, a five-year stint in Darwin cemented his love and knowledge of barra and all things mean and lure-hungry. Tales from those years spent fishing the Territory's famous tidal and fresh waters, plus a close call with Cyclone Tracy in 1974, could fill these pages many times over.

Naturally, those Top End adventures formed the basis for Warren's early magazine drafts. While he hit pay dirt reasonably quickly in *Australian Outdoors*, success didn't come immediately in the fishing magazines. His first submission to *Fishing World* in early 1977 was rejected, and returned with a polite, encouraging letter from the editor, Ron Calcutt. Heeding Calcutt's sage advice, Warren went back to the drawing board and had another attempt. This time he was successful and his first-ever fishing

What Others Say...

Glen Booth - former editor of *Modern Fishing*, *NAFA* and *FishLife*

Clean copy. Delivered on time. A variety of colourful, in focus pics. Correctly captioned. When dealing with freelancers' work, these are the elements that make an editor's life far less stressful.

Warren Steptoe was writing for fishing magazines when I was still at school, so to handle submissions from the likes of him, Dick Lewers, Vic McCristal and the rest of the *Modern Fishing* cognoscenti was quite an honour, but also somewhat daunting.

Granted, his typewriters (or later, computers) seemed to be missing a comma key, and I occasionally used some of the heftier paragraphs to prop the office door open on windy days, but all in all his work wasn't too bad!

However, it was Warren's photography that really made magazine readers and the fishing tackle industry sit up and take note. It was streets ahead of just about every fishing mag' contributor in the country – and probably still is. Camera technology has improved to a point now where absolutely everybody can take a great pic, but back in the '80s and '90s it was all slide film, manual focus and mastering the intricacies of shutter speeds and f/stops.

Granted, there were way too many mack tuna pics, ditto for obscure outback grunter species, BMX bicycles on bloody sand dunes and an equivalent number of skinny kids in lifejackets (his boys, David and John), but each shot was perfectly composed, tack sharp and perfectly lit. There simply wasn't a dud pic in the sheet – ever.



Portrait of a contented man. There is nothing half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats.



The Steptoe boys practically grew up in the Quintrex. Little things like a broken arm never got in the way of important stuff like fishing!



Steptoe caught his first-ever sailfish in the early '80s out of his 4.5m Quintrex, offshore from Cape Moreton. It was an exciting time for small boat fishos.



Far north coast bassing circa 1980.

and mackerel with Darryl Steel, and around Mornington Island a little later, helped open anglers' eyes to the exciting options available to fly rodders in the salt.

For Warren, those early saltwater fly fishing efforts had many highlights, but it's hard to go past the capture of an 11.2kg yellowfin tuna on 4kg tippet from Moreton Bay in 1989. It was an ANSA record at the time, made all the more memorable by the fact that his 11-year-old son, David, drove the boat.

By the late '80s, Steptoe's career had gathered momentum, helped along by an increasing volume of boating content (a move he credits to Peter Horrobin) and by-lines in various lifestyle magazines. On that front, one of Warren's career highlights was undoubtedly the smooth sport fishing piece he wrote for the refined readership of *Australian Playboy* – back when the publication was all about the words, of course!

In all seriousness, diversification was vital in order to remain viable and sustainable as a fulltime freelancer. And for Warren, expanding into the boating media was his meal ticket. In many ways, fishing writing became a sideline to his boating work, at least from a financial perspective.

At the height of his career, Steptoe was consistently reviewing 50 or 60 boats a year for magazines such as *Modern Boating*, *Club Marine*, *NAFA* and *Modern Fishing*, as well as doing



No stranger to big flathead, these days Warren tends to focus on smaller lizards. This solid fish inhaled a soft plastic shad intended for mulloway.

brochure and promotional photography for a number of the main players. And that was on top of his regular fishing features and columns. Even with that volume of work, it was often a struggle to make ends meet, particularly as a single parent with a young family to support. It's hard to

attract much sympathy, though – especially when everyone thinks you're on a never-ending fishing trip!

But Steptoe made it work, and continued to deliver a raft of memorable stories. None more so than the articles about his mountain bike

What Others Say...

Dave Donald - fishing writer & recently retired Cape York fishing guide

Warren and I have been good mates since way back when, and over the years have shared many adventures. We've wandered goggle-eyed through Kings Cross post Mardi Gras after attending one of the early Penrith Panthers-based Tackle Shows, made a movie together up on the Cape, danced the fly rod polka as rampaging longtails tried to tie knots in our lines at Weipa, shared my fight with prostate cancer, barra fished at Mapoon during a cyclone and tossed plastics for flaties in the Clarence – and that's just for starters!

The man may be small in stature but he's been a giant on the fishing and boating scene in Oz. I've long admired his passion, dedication and perseverance, all essential attributes if you aspire to become a viable, full-time writer in the 'local' media pond, particularly when there's a family to support. However, these credentials also need a big dose of what's loosely called the 'X-factor' these days, and it is a measure of the very high standard that Warren set, particularly regarding photographs, that editors actively sought his material for their publications from an early stage. He's been a fountain of advice for my own media journey.

Some of my most valued memories of Steptoe involve giving each other heaps while sharing a boat somewhere! Lively banter is one of those rarely mentioned jewels of fishing with good mates, and Warren can pour shit from a great height with the best. And like all great mates, when you get face to face after not seeing each other for a while, it's just as though you went fishing together yesterday.

As far as outdoor writers go, Warren is definitely one of Australia's finest. Let's hope that his priceless contribution to the fishing and boating scene is remembered by the industry he promoted for decades and won't be allowed to just drift into obscurity.

Good one, Andrew – thanks for reminding fishers and boaters out there of the enormity of Warren's legacy.

And Waz – penning this has me really looking forward to our next fishing trip!

feature, on Top End barra, hit the stands in the November 1977 issue of *Fishing World*. And so it began.

The Write Time

In 1978, Warren left Darwin and moved to Brisbane. For the next few years he wrote part-time from home, steadily increasing his output, while still panel beating around town. He also did three heavy tackle marlin seasons in Cairns during the early '80s, working as a decky for several renowned game boat skippers, including the late Geoff Ferguson (who Steptoe rates among the all-time best in the world). And then, in 1984, he took the plunge and became a full-time freelancer. "From that point on, I didn't have a real job for 31 years!" Warren laughs, reminiscing fondly.

The '80s was an exciting time for sport fishing in Australia, particularly in south-east Queensland. Swept up in it all, Steptoe and his mates were using 4.5m trailer boats to tap into some fledgling fisheries, including spectacular shallow water action on juvenile black marlin around Fraser Island and Hervey Bay, and sailfish and marlin off Cape Moreton. No doubt plenty of long-term magazine readers will also recall Warren's articles on spinning for longtail tuna and spotty mackerel in Moreton Bay using homemade lead 'slugs'

and Fat-R's poppers, Mitchell 499s and Butterworth MT996Hs. It's no coincidence that a 7-8ft/6-8kg spin rod was commonly referred to as a 'Moreton Bay spin stick' in the '80s and '90s, even if you lived in southern NSW!

And who could forget the images of young David and John Steptoe, safely clad in brightly coloured life jackets and sporting split-pumpkin grins, which regularly featured in *Modern Fishing* during that period? Anglers of all ages drooled over the fishing adventures the Steptoe boys enjoyed with their dad and his mates at places like Moreton Bay, Wathumba Creek and Jumpinpin (anyone else remember those enormous flathead?). Even now, as I flick through a mountain of old, dog-eared magazines, I'm still envious.

In amongst it all, there was often some fly fishing going on too. It didn't matter whether the location was Cape York, Tasmania or the Territory, the long wand was rarely far away – despite Warren's regular protestations in print that fly fishing doesn't pay the bills! Back in the '80s, when shorts were short and men were men, saltwater fly fishing was still pretty new stuff. And Steptoe's stories and images from those early days, particularly on Moreton Bay in pursuit of tuna



When you've spent the best part of three decades leaning over a light table, you learn a thing or two about capturing a great image.

Fat Boy Slim. Mountain bikes, including the Fat Bike, have provided Warren with a much-needed outlet separate to fishing, boating and writing... Of course, they've taken him and his mate Cotter on some memorable angling expeditions as well!



escapades on Cape York with good mate, Gary Cotter. Those original 'Pedal Power' features, published in *Modern Fishing* in 1993, raised the bar for Steptoe and Cotter's frequent boys' own adventures on the Cape, and struck a chord with keen young anglers. No doubt plenty of Malvern Stars were dusted off across the country in the wake of those articles going to print!

It's not until you start digging through Warren's back catalogue of published work, however, that you really appreciate just how diverse his fishing experience is and how prolific he was. I lost *days* reading old magazines and tear sheets while writing this piece. And nearly as much time again trying to work out how the hell to do it all justice. He covered damn near *everything* at one point or another over the years: jungle perch and sooty grunter; bass, cod and yellowbelly; kids fishing; flathead luring; small boats and canoes; pelagics on lure and fly; impoundment barra; billfish; trout; and virtually every tropical species and northern hot spot you could imagine – and so much more. It's all there, wrapped up in 30-odd years of fishing and boating magazines. And we haven't even mentioned the photos...

Picture Perfect

Throughout his career, Warren's photography consistently set him apart from other fishing and boating writers. As former *Modern Fishing* editor, Glen Booth, comments elsewhere in these pages, "It was streets ahead of just about every fishing mag' contributor in the country – and probably still is." You won't get too many arguments there.



David and John Steptoe were the envy of fishing magazine readers the country over during the '80s and '90s. The life jackets were removed for this pic of the youngsters posing with a popper-caught Moreton Bay longtail.

Steptoe went about things differently. He explored alternative angles and developed an eye for a visual narrative; the landscape, the angler and the adventure. And the fish, of course – preferably wet, glistening and with fins erect. All the stuff that looks easy when done well, but is harder than it seems.

Warren was also one of the first fishing writers to take the technique of daytime 'fill-flash' and successfully apply it to fishing photography. Pretty soon it became industry standard for delivering magazine-quality images when shooting on high contrast, unforgiving slide film. Keep in mind, too, that freelancers had to foot the bill for film and processing costs, which were typically between 50c and \$1 a frame... If you listened carefully when

What Others Say...

Steve Starling

I knew something had been missing from the last half dozen or so issues of *FishLife*, but I just couldn't put my finger on what it was... until Andrew Mayo asked me to contribute my two bob's worth to this long overdue retrospective. It's bloody Steptoe! No gnarled, skinny knees straddling fat-tired pushbikes, no crazy expeditions to the back of Butt-Whatsit chasing the mythical three-eyed Lake Eyre grunter... and no pics of his mate Cotter! The world just isn't the same any more.

In all seriousness, Warren's work has been an integral and valuable part of the Australian fishing media scene since well before many of you reading this were born. His name belongs on a short list of the game's genuine trend-setters and more astute observers, and his quiet exit from the scene leaves a sizeable hole in the fabric of angling communications. I can only hope that all the hot air being blown in his direction via this piece is enough to cajole him into coming out of retirement for a curtain call, to write even a couple more articles. We could probably even forgive a few "I remember the day..." reminiscences from a bloke with such an extensive track record.

Very few Australians have ever managed to make a full time living – even a modest one – from recreational fishing journalism. Warren is one of a handful of us who managed to pull that trick off over the years, although I'm sure he'd also be the first to agree that the income generated is far from being either consistent or spectacular! It's more of a lifestyle choice, but that can be a difficult story to sell to your family when the rent is due and the fridge empty. We've all been there. It takes guts and determination to hang in: qualities I reckon Steptoe has in good measure.

I've always loved something I once heard Rex Hunt say: "It took me 20 years to become an overnight success". I'm sure that's a sentiment Warren Steptoe would also relate to, and it provides a salutary lesson to some of today's up-and-coming wannabes, many of whom want it all and want it now. Very few things of value in this life come easily. I have a hunch that Steptoe sweated blood getting the words to sing in his earlier days, but he hung in there, took the critical appraisal of various editors on the chin and honed his art. The results speak for themselves. During the latter part of his career, Warren's features were often the first I flicked to when the latest copy of *FishLife* hit my desk, and it wasn't just to look at his consistently spectacular images.



It doesn't matter whether the target is jungle perch, bass or cod, there are few places Warren would rather be than on the sweetwater. This time it's a beautiful bass river in northern NSW.

the motor drive rang off, it almost sounded like a mini poker machine coughing up coins. The film processing lab was always the big winner!

Catch-and-release fishing was another constant theme in Steptoe's writing, and it also came through in his photography. He was a particularly strong advocate for better catch-and-release practices to ensure that fish destined for release were handled appropriately. And he made real efforts to bring the readership along with him. Take a close look at Warren's features over the years, and you'll see lots of photos of fish in the water, even back in the '80s when the background of choice was more commonly a pebblecrete driveway, the back lawn or a filleting table.

"I wanted to change the way people think about how fish could, or should, be photographed," Steptoe explains. Looking at fishing photography today, it's fair to say that he successfully achieved that.

Grass Roots

It wasn't all about Cape York and cover shots, though. Throughout his career, Warren was an active member of the Brisbane Sportfishing Club and ANSA Queensland, and had a long-standing involvement in fisheries research, junior angler development and Queensland fisheries politics.

In many ways, Steptoe's efforts as a recreational fishing advocate were some of his most important contributions of all. Take, for example, his role in the push to have Australian bass protected from commercial fishing in Queensland during the mid-'80s. Outraged by reports of pros targeting large aggregations of spawning bass in the Noosa lakes system, a number of concerned anglers, including Warren, began lobbying government to take action. Steptoe wrote about it, none-too-subtly, raising awareness and generating angler support. And through his involvement in (what is now) Sunfish, he participated in the discussions that eventually saw the introduction of a zero commercial bag limit for bass in Queensland rivers.

Around the same time, Warren was part of the fledgling Queensland native fish stocking movement. He was one of many passionate freshwater anglers who saw the potential for stocking the Sunshine State's impoundments with yellowbelly, cod and bass... Barra came a little later. "We had all these dams in Queensland, but with no bloody fish that you could catch!"

It was a complicated process, though. The science was moving along quickly, thanks to aquaculture developments and the work of fisheries biologists like Stuart Rowland and John Burke. However, the cost and logistics of stocking impoundments in a coordinated fashion proved extremely challenging, and fell largely on the shoulders of a small number of passionate local fish stocking groups.

And throughout, Steptoe was writing about it – nudging things along where he could and



In-water release shots became something of a Steptoe trademark over the years, and he used them very effectively to promote appropriate catch-and-release practices. And yes, that is Gary Cotter! Here he's releasing more than 120cm of Cape York salty barra on one of the pair's infamous mountain bike escapades.

What Others Say...

Steve Watson - Brisbane Sportfishing Club and ANSA Qld

After 36 years as close mates and sharing many extended fishing trips and family holidays, you grow to know a person well. It's easy to sum Warren up in a few words: genuine, tenacious and paternally loyal to his family.

What some might not have realised, however, was his ability to use a pen and camera to the benefit of all fishers, and his ability to convey to the angling community the injustices we've suffered at the hands of unscrupulous operators and the mismanagement of our fisheries. The fishing fraternity across Australia certainly owes Warren a lot for his untiring efforts over the years.

Warren's style of photography was unique in its day, and for a bloke who once told me that digital would never take off, he made a remarkably swift turnaround and embraced the 'modern' technology with the same ease as he did with film.

And trust me, Waz knows his stuff. I've fished with him for everything from bass to billfish and I can say, without fear of contradiction, that he's equally at home waving a wand at a brown in Tasmania as he is backing down on a black on the Ribbons.

He never let the job go to his head and I can happily say he's the same bloke I met all those years ago... except now he rides a bike! His informative writings, impeccable knowledge and use of the lens will be missed by us all in his retirement. Best wishes, Wazza.

helping to fuel interest among anglers. And once again, through Sunfish, he was involved in many of the more difficult discussions with the bureaucracy. Eventually state government funding was allocated to stocking enhancements in the late '80s, and momentum built.

In time, the results were spectacular, especially on the bass and barra front. The next challenge was to make the fishery self-sustaining, which is where the concept of a Stocked Impoundment Permit (SIP) came in. Unsurprisingly, Warren was part of that process too. He spent 15 years as a recreational fishing representative on the Queensland Government's Freshwater Management Advisory Committee, which oversaw the introduction of the SIP.

Like many who were involved in the stocking movement (and there were a lot), Steptoe is fiercely proud of Queensland's world-class impoundment fisheries. And justifiably so. It's incredible to think we've reached a point where 50cm bass and metre-plus barra are virtually the norm. It's easy to take it all for granted though, so the next time you find yourself wrestling an impoundment hog, spare a thought for the passionate folk who made it happen and who continue to keep the fish stocking wheels turning.

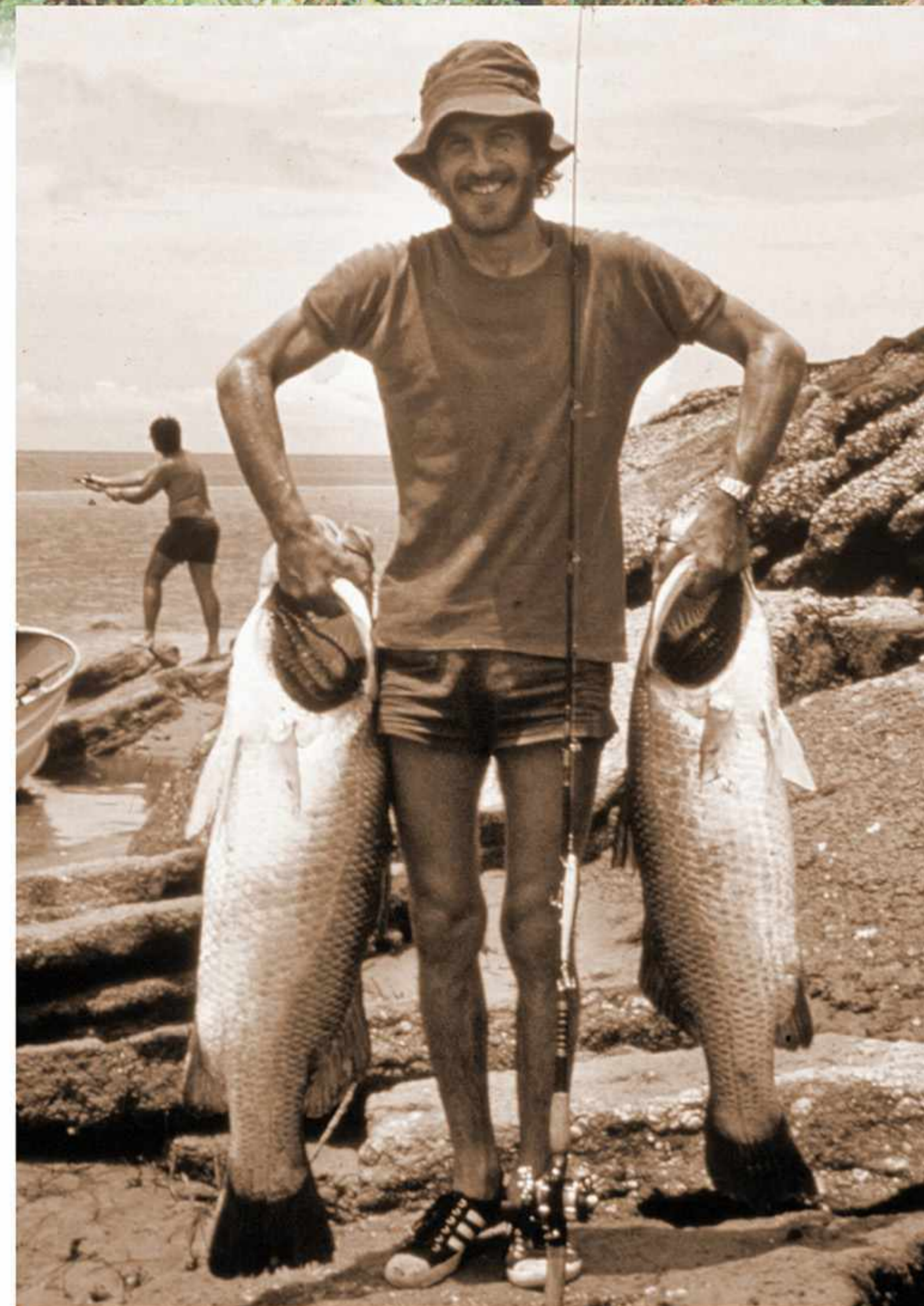
In the saltwater space, Warren fought the good fight for longer than many realise on the issue of ring netting of spotted mackerel in south-east Queensland, which decimated spotty stocks during the early '90s. He lobbied government tirelessly and continually drew attention to the issue through his writings. Sadly, it took the fishery's virtual collapse before action was taken.

Queensland sport fishers do a pretty good job of recognising their own, and Warren's efforts haven't gone unnoticed. He's a life member of Sunfish, ANSA Queensland and the Brisbane Sportfishing Club, and a winner of both of ANSA Queensland's most prestigious accolades – the Ron Dempster Award and the Eric Moller Trophy – for his contribution to recreational fishing in the Sunshine State. While it's not particularly well known outside the state's sport fishing community, the Ron Dempster Award in particular is a pretty big deal. You need only look at a list of recipients to realise just how prestigious it is. In addition to Warren Steptoe, you'll find names of luminaries such as Jack Erskine, Vic McCristal, Bruce Alvey, John and Jennifer Mondora, Alf Hogan, Gerry Cook and Don McPherson on the honour roll.

Movers & Shakers

When asked about his influences, Warren's response is typical of a bloke who plays fair – he finds it very difficult to keep the list short for fear of leaving someone out. But when pressed, a couple of familiar names rise to the top – Ron Calcutt and Vic McCristal.

"Ron wrote me a few letters – I still have them somewhere." Steptoe says, referring to Calcutt's advice on his early submissions to *Fishing World*.



A five-year stint in the Top End during the mid-'70s provided some memorable barra fishing. This brace of saltwater horses came from 'The Rock' in Darwin Harbour and fell to a twitched ABU Killer.



The imagery wasn't all about fish and boats.

"He was always very encouraging and never critical. He was just so enthusiastic and clever in the way he'd make a suggestion."

You only have to listen to the way that Warren talks about Vic McCristal to realise how much respect he has for the man.

"Vic definitely influenced the way I think – both ethically and critically – about fishing. He was always analysing the how, when and why. And that's what truly great anglers do."

Of course, many others left their mark. Sid Elphick, the man who ran the Lismore corner store where Warren first met Vic in the '60s, had a significant influence on a young Steptoe's angling apprenticeship, providing gentle guidance on everything from bass to mackerel.

Warren also offers a nod to former *Modern Fishing* editors Peter Horrobin and Glen Booth and, more recently, **FishLife** publisher Scott Amon. Cape York guides Dave Donald and Gary Wright receive a mention for their angling innovation, as do a raft of Tasmanian movers and shakers: Bill Beck, Jason Garrett, Ken Orr and Noel Jetson. And then there's a list of mates too long to include here... But Steptoe assures me they know who they are.

Finally, spend a bit of time with Warren and it soon becomes apparent that as much as he loves fishing and his fat bike, they run a very distant



Boating photography and writing was the key to Warren's sustainability and longevity as a full-time freelancer.

second to his wife, Mary, and the extended Steptoe clan. I can't recall which of Warren's reprobate mates suggested that the best thing about Wazza is Mary... but they may be onto something there.

If you've read this far, I suspect you'll be exhaling deeply and shaking your head in

amazement at the contribution Warren Steptoe has made to recreational fishing in this country. I know I am. He has few peers in the fishing communications landscape and his influence has been deep and wide-reaching. Thanks for sharing the journey with us, Warren. Here's hoping it hasn't ended... **FL**



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