

A guide to Catching Yellow Tail

Trolling Lures

This can be divided into surface type lures and diving lures.

Surface type lures

I prefer these for a number of reasons. I use bungees most of the time, but the exact same applies for trolling with rod and reel. I started using squid type lures because i predominantly fished off semi-rigid boats (rubber ducks). Rapala type diving lure, have two sets of trebles and they don't mix well with inflatable boats. The funny part was that when i switched to trolling only surface type squids, we seemed to outfish most other boats. We seemed to be catching more fish than if we had been trolling rapala type diving lures. The reasoning behind this is quite simple!! You're trolling along and 500m ahead you see birds working!! All i do is open the throttles and get there as fast as i can!! Whilst the other boats first have to pull their rapala's in, before they can get there!! Needless to say, the first boat to the school normally gets the fish!! Secondly, squids don't tangle easily!! So you spend less time sorting out tangles and more time fishing!! After landing a fish, you simply throw the squid back into the water. With diving type lures, the thrashing of the fish often means that the lure needs tuning, to get it to swim straight again! Once again, fishing time wasted!!

If i was allowed only one trolling surface lure, it'll be the green meduim sized Yamashita. 9 out of 10 times, its the one normally hit first!! My normal spread is 4 squids, of which two will be green Yamashita's and one will be brown and one will be pink .

Pictured below is the usual colours i prefer: Brown, Pink and Green Yamashita Squids



This is what they look like when you buy them



This is how to rig them



I've also had good success on the tuna runner type squids.



VERY easy to rig them too!



I've also had good success running all of these above mentioned lures about 1 meter behind a small bird. The bird creates a commotion on the water, attracting the ever-curious yellowtail.



Diving lures

As mentioned above, i'm not a big fan of them. They how-ever do catch fish, with the new Rapala x-raps working quite well!! Colours, the old red head is a must, Chartruese, Bunker, Spotted Minnow, Silver Blue Mackerel and Yellowfin tuna are also a VERY good choice!!

XRAP 30's:

From Top to Bottom:
BUNKER
CHARTEUSE
SPOTTED MINNOW



XRAP 20's, slightly smaller than the XRAP 30, and dives a bit shallower. The XRAP 30 dives to 30', which is very roughly 10m deep, whilst the XRAP 20 dives to 20', which is roughly 6-7m deep. Very handy when the fish are holding in shallow area's, because your XRAP 30 will get stuck on the bottom.

From Top to bottom:

- Yellowfin Tuna
- Spotted Minnow
- Bunker
- Red Head



Storm Lures. Half the price of a Rapala and just as effective!!



Some of the smaller STORM's as well



Here's a few of the lures, just to illustrate the sizes. From top to bottom:

Rapala CD18 Purple Mackerel

Rapala CD14 Red Head

Rapala XRAP 30 Chartreuse

Storm Deep Thunder Pink

Rapala XRAP 20 Red Head



Ok, we've covered the bases for trolling lures. Now, we can look at casting lures.

If i was told i'm only allowed one spoon/spinner for yellowtail, i'd with-out a doubt choose a 'snake' spinner. This spinner has probably caused the demise of untold amounts of yellowtail!! There simply is NOTHING that comes close to it!!

Chisel nose perspex plugs work well, so do a plethora of spinners and spoons.

My advice, bugger them all and just buy a whole bunch of 'snake' spinners!! You get two sizes these days, a large and a small 'snake'. I've had alot more success on the larger 'snake' spinners. Seems to have a better action in the water!!

Pictured below, from top to bottom:

- Keel Spinner
- Wally Wicks Spinner
- Steve Champion Anchovy Spinner
- Steve Champion Snake Spinner
- Ashley Read small Snake Spinner
- Ashley Read normal Snake Spinner. This is the spinner that has probably accounted for 95% of all the yellowtail i've ever caught whilst spinning!!



Chisel nose plugs



Get a few in various sizes, depending on the tackle you're using. On some occasions that are preferred over the usual spinners, but its the visual strike on a surface lure that offers GREAT excitement!!

For sport on bass type tackle, these pictured below work well!! Roosta, chug-bugs, maria's, skitterpops,etc all work!!



Ok, so i hear that there is some yellowtail about, what tackle would i pack in?

4 Bungees with 2 green yamashita's, one brown and one white yamashita. (if you don't have trolling rods)

6x6' trolling rods with TLD25's or Torruim 20 or 30's or TLD20/40 or TLD15/30 or Daiwa 30's etc loaded with 24kg line!! Simply tie a snake spinner to the end. Four rods will be trolled FLAT whilst the other 2 will be trolled in an upright position.

2x 8' spinning rods, with 5000-8000 sized fixed spool reels loaded with 30-50lb braid.

Now for the most important part: FINDING the fish!!

Exactly the same applies as for snoek. Call up your local tackle shop, check the fishing forums, speak to your fishing buddy's, etc,etc

Generally, and i do MEAN generally, yellowtail prefer warm water. 16-19 degrees is considered perfect!! On the flip side, i've caught yellowtail and Yellowfin tuna in water as cold as 13 degrees!! Nothing is set in stone, so use this merely as a guideline!!

SW'erly winds "generally" warm up the west coast. WHICH means Cape Point, Robben Island and Dassen Island.

Lets go fishing!!

Assuming you've found out that there are fish at a certain spot, (i'll talk about spots later), off to sea we go. I'm going to primarily concentrate on fishing with lures, will cover bait-fishing later.

I like a very early launch. Run to your designated spot. As you get closer to your spot, start looking for birds working. You're generally looking for 'sterretjies' or 'terns' as they're known. These birds can't dive into the water, so they hover above schools of yellowtail, waiting for them to chase the baitfish to the surface, so that they can pick up the scraps. Most of your action will be around these birds.

Gannets are the big birds the dive-bomb from great heights into the water. These are generally working on baitfish fairly deep. I don't bother with them, UNLESS there are a good number of them

working together.

Penguins often fool us anglers, when they also chase up baitfish and the terns/sterretjies and the gannets work on them. I have caught yellowtail between the penguins, but most of the time, its only penguins!!

So, you get to your spot, very early and there's no birds. What now?

Well, the birds generally start working quite a while AFTER sunrise. So, now we start trolling, whilst waiting for the birds and the fish to rise.

Pictured below is sterrentjies/terns hovering and gannets/malga's dive bombing into a school of baitfish being pushed up by yellowtail



Ok, now we start trolling. Errm, what speed?? Well, i've caught fish at 3knts and i've also caught fish at 15knts!! There is no SET rule, but i generally troll between 5-6knts. How do i set the lines? Different places use different lengths of line. I use 15m bungee's, which mean all 4 of my lures run 15m behind the boat. I then will set the two trolling rods upright, with snake spinners, set a fair way behind the last squid.

The problem with setting your 4 squids on rods behind the boat is that you can't get them to be exactly the same distance from the boat. Why is that a problem? Because if one lure is further behind the others, the chances are good that it'll be the one to catch the fish. It will look like a stragler/sick fish that has fallen behind the school of baitfish. The problem with this is that you only catch a single fish each time and you won't get multiple hook-ups.....

ZZZZZZ..... the port side outside rod screams, or in my case, the bungee goes tight. What now??

Stop the boat and start reeling in the fish? NOOOOOO!!!

Yellowtail travel and feed in schools. So, you need to capitalise on that!!

Try and visualise this now: your port side line goes. IMMEDIATELY turn your boat hard to the port side, maintaining speed. This does a few things. It speeds up the starboard side lures, creating a image of baitfish fleeing. As you turn around, try and go over the same area you got the fish in. Hopefully now, your single strike has turned into a 2-3-4-5 or full house strike!! NOW you stop the boat and start retrieving fish.

If you did this and still only have the one fish on, stop the boat, start retrieving the fish. At the same time, get an angler to grab a spinning rod and throw his spinner towards the hooked fish. The school will most likely still be with the hooked fish and a hook-up on the spinning rod is very likely!!

That pretty much covers trolling.

Now, the birds start to work and you start seeing fish on the surface!! What now?? If you are the only boat around, try trolling. Try and anticipate which way the school is travelling and try and pass the front of them. NEVER TROLL THROUGH A SCHOOL!! They will simply sound and dis-appear!!

If trolling through a school or two doesn't work, its time to change your tactics!! Bring out the spinning sticks!! My favourite!!

Clear all your lines. Now you're going to be spinning for them!! Watch for where the birds are working. Get to them as fast as you can!! As you approach the school, slow down and slowly approach them. Even with 4 stroke motors, charging up to close to them will cause the school to sound. You need to get near to them, then slowly sneak up on them. Always try and approach them, so that the anglers on board will be able to cast WITH the wind. This is where the 8' spinning rods work well. They allow you to cast very far with the wind from behind. This means the boat doesn't have to get too close to the school.

When your spinner hits the water, start retrieving as fast as you can. The strike will normally occur with-in the first 5 seconds of your spinner hitting the water. If you get a hook-up, get the other anglers to cast towards your fish. The school will stay with your hooked fish and multiple hook-ups is quite common!!

The trick here is to be the first boat to the school!! You'll soon learn how to watch strentjies/terns. Often, you'll see only one or two terns that finds the fish and before long you have 20+ birds there!! Also watch the water surface. Often you find fish feeding on the surface with-out birds!! Good eye-sight is definitely an advantage here.

You'll end up charging around the whole day when yellowtail are like that!! Take extra fuel with!!

Spots:

Lets start off with Cape Point.

Warm water: 16-19degrees.

Preferred winds NW'lery and SW'lery

Many guys start trolling from Buffelsbay, close to the kelp beds, pass Rooikrantz up to the Point, then outside the Point. I don't bother, unless i see birds working. I've simply had alot more success outside the Point.

Outside the Point, South West Reefs, Bellows and Anvil are the usual haunts. I normally start at SW reef, troll to Bellows, then around Bellows, then to Anvil and then back to Bellows and then to SW reefs. Starting all over again!!

Rocky bank is another good bet, but i don't bother going there, unless i've heard of good fish being caught there!!

Be very careful of the bellows area. It breaks heavily and can have a backwash, so don't get too close.

Anvil also breaks in a large swell.

SW reefs breaks in a BIG sea.

Yellowtail LOVE structure. Use your echo and look for shallow pinnacles. Often you'll find yellowtail milling around these area's.

One word of warning: don't use light tackle at Cape Point!! My wife has taken YF over 60kg's on yellowtail tackle here!! We've caught YF up to 70kg's and have heard of 80kg YF caught here!! I have also two friends who are very experienced guys, who have both seen Marlin, positively identified Marlin, here!! One at SW reefs and the other at Bellows!! Last season we took Dorado just outside Bellows!!

Pictured below: BELLOWS!!



Robben Island.

The water MUST be warm!! 16-18 degrees!!

Best area is around Whale-Rock, which breaks HEAVILY!!

I usually troll from Whale-rock, to the Island, then around the island, rather close to the kelp beds. Keep your eyes peeled for birds!!

Dassen Island.

My FAVOURITE!! Very few guys fish here!! And there's a good reason for it. There are lots of reefs that break behind the island, which is where the fish are!! Launching is for the more experienced guys. The surge is pretty bad on the slip in a big sea, and quite a few guys have already lost their boats and/or tow vehicles on this slip!!

The yellowtail are VERY finicky and you must really pull out all the stops to get your fish. On the odd days, they do go beserk and eat ANYTHING, but most of the time, you really have to work hard to get your fish!!

Plenty of Penguins to confuse you!! And a resident school of fish that reside on the inside of Huisbaai, that simply refuse to even look at your spinner!!

Many times we've come back with our full quota of 40 fish for 4 guys and then find that the other guys end up with 3/4/5 per BOAT!! Not easy fishing!!

Some things that work well, LONG rods, so that you can stay far away from the fish. Pulling your lures at LEAST 25m behind your boat.

Struisbaai!!

This is THE place for large yellowtail for the Western Cape anglers!! Fish of 20kg+ are still common!! Large quantities of yellowtail are taken on the Struisbaai banks.

You need a very sea-worthy vessel, as the sea's are normally rough and even a calm sea can become very ugly in less than half an hour. A plotter is ESSENTIAL to fish here.

Some noteworthy spots:

The wreck of the Pioneer

The wreck of the Septer

The block of the Wafra on the 6mile bank

The Growwe Banke (6 mile bank)

The 12 miles bank (19 miles outside the harbour)

Saxon Reef (arniston)

The Virgin territories of Skipskop

and finally, a place ALL anglers should visit at least once in their life-time, The Alphard Banks (41nm from the harbour!!) This is where giant bluefin, 200-350kg+ class were seen, last year!! Yellowtail schools as big as 4 soccerfields, all on the surface, says it all!!

Best is to get a local angler or one who knows that area to accompany you on your first few trips!!

Bungee's

You've seen me referring to them. What are they? And how do they work?

Check the picture below. All a bungee is: its a piece of 16mm spearfishing rubber, that stretches out to roughly 3 times its length. So, say a 1m bungee, will stretch out to 3m+.

How do you make one? Take the 1m piece of bungee and insert a piece of cord that's 2m long through the inside of the bungee. Now tie off both ends. This allows the bungee to be stretched to 2m. Now i tie 2.0mm mono to the one end, measure off 15m and then tie a swivel or snap swivel. To this i attach a 60kg trace and a squid with hooks.

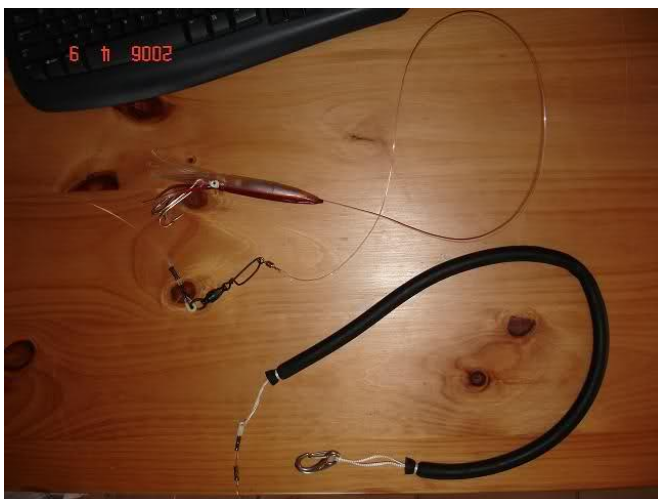
This gets thrown out behind the boat, with one end tied off to the boat. When a fish grabs the lure, the bungee will be pulled taught. So, you have to keep a close eye on the bungees!!

The reason i use a 60kg trace at the end, is in case a shark or seal grabs the fish, then the trace will snap and i only lose the lure and not the complete bungee.

How strong are they? Well, if i rig it directly with a squid onto the 2.0mm mono, then you can catch Yellowfin Tuna up to 60kg's+ on this rig!! Anything bigger, you then need bigger bungees!! Taking 80-90kg YF on bungees is common on the deck boats!!

Why use bungees? Well, they cheap!! They take very little space!! They're effective, efficient and very quick to operate and deploy!! Most commercials use them for yellowtail, longfin and YF tuna.

Sometimes you'll go catch crayfish and see yellowtail!! BUGGER!! No rods on board!! No problem, just bring out the bungees!! Four fully rigged bungees, rolled away on handline yo-yo's, will fit in one carrier bag.



Bait Fishing

When do you fish with bait? Once again, listen and watch!! You'll HEAR from your local contacts when the fish are feeding on bait.

Generally late January to end February, you have HUGE concentrations of yellowtail at Cape Point, all being caught on bait. Catching anything from 1000-1500kg's (1-1.5ton) per day per commercial boat is quite normal!! Sometimes with up to 60 commercial boats fishing there, per day, for 2-4 weeks!! Don't be too concerned, our yellowtail stocks are in an extremely healthy state!!

Lets start off with the bait. I also work on roughly one 5kg box of pilchards per fisherman (commercially). Recreationally, 2-3 box's would be sufficient for 3-4 anglers. Now comes the secret!! FRESH chokka/squid!! Not bought, but caught just before you get to Cape Point, at BuffelsBay.

Tackle for chokka/squid fishing is simple. A 6-7' drop shot type rod, with a small reel loaded with 5-6kg line. With squid, the thinner the line, the better!! I use 10kg handlines, because any thinner, you simply can't grip the line properly.

Jigs - YAMASHITA'S!! They're phenomenal!! You get floating and sinking jigs. You need one sinking and one floating, per line. Yamashita only makes the floating one. Colours that work very well is red/pink and neon yellow. For the sinking jigs, neon yellow and i like a multi-coloured one. Tie the sinking jig to the end of your line and the floating one, about a meter higher up. Drop this over the side, until it hits the bottom. Reel it a few centimetre's off the bottom. Occasionally jerk the line, to give the jigs movements. When a squid grabs, you'll feel the line just getting 'heavier'. Simply retrieve, with in a constant motion, until the squid is right next to the boat. Just before it reach's the surface, hold it there for 2-5 seconds, and TURN your face away!! The squid will eject a stream of ink, that'll be aimed for your face!! Once it has ejected all its ink, lift into the boat and remove the jig. Put the squid in a cool place, out of sunlight.

Tackle for bait fishing for yellowtail. I fish with a 45kg, a 52kg and a 60kg handline. Because of the various current strengths, you'll need boating sinkers, the ones with the two loops, one on either end of the sinker, in weights from 1oz to 8-10oz. Some 10/0 snoek type hooks (with-out the swivels) and some small plastic squids. These squids are about 10-15cm long and available at all tackle shops.

Tie a sinker to the end of your line, the weight will be dependant on the current strength. Now tie a piece of trace, same breaking strain as the main line, to the other end of the sinker. Slid the plastic squid up onto the line and then tie your hook, also with a loop type knot. The small plastic squid will then be slid back down to the hook. All this does is give the bait more life in the water. (some rock and surf guys also use these!!)

Ok, you've got your bait and tackle sorted. Caught your 20-30 chokka and now get to the Point. There are 2 scenario's that you'll encounter:

First Scenario. You get past the Point and see the commercials laying on anchor, catching fish!!

You have a couple of options now. The easiest is simply to throw anchor close to the other boats and wait for the fish to come through. Alternatively, you can use your echo-sounder to locate schools of fish or pinnacles or any structure, close to where the other boats are fishing, and then anchor. If there are plenty of commercial boats, i simply anchor close by and wait for the fish to come through.

Now you've anchored your boat. What next?? Well, WATCH what the boats around you are doing. Specifically, watch the boats that are CATCHING fish. Are they using sinkers? If so, how big? Try and imitate their tackle the best you can. Because the strength of the current varies, its difficult to say what size sinker to use. If in doubt, use a heavy sinker and throw your line out, feeding out line until it hits the bottom. If your sinker is too light, it'll take a VERY long time to reach the bottom, because the current will wash it up, higher into the water column. Once you've found the size sinker that takes you down to the bottom, bait up with a piece of squid and a half a pilchard (ie. just the head cut off). Drop this to the bottom. When the line hits the bottom, pull it about 2m off the bottom and tie your line to the boat. The bait will now be set at about 1.5m off the bottom, so you'll not get stuck on the bottom and the sharks will not bother you.

Do the same with your second line, but instead of pulling it up 2m, rather pull it up 5-6m. This way you're covering a variety of depths, so that you can figure out where the fish are.

So you get a bite!! What do you do? You LEAVE the fish there!! Yellowtail RARELY get off a hook once hooked. By doing this, you keep the school of fish under you. If you hooked the fish on the lower line, drop your first line lower and you should hook-up. Then its a simple matter of pulling your fish in. Remember though, ALWAYS leave one hooked fish in the water!! Only once the school leaves, and nobody gets anymore bites, do you retrieve the fish that was hooked and left to swim around.

Sometimes the fish are very high up in the water column. This is when you need to use drift lines (ie no sinkers) or very small sinkers. Using you echo-sounder, you'll be able to see what depth they're swimming at. Similarly, just watching what the successful guys around you are doing, will help tremendously.

GENERALLY, when yellowtail are feeding on bait, especially on the bottom, trolling is futile. I've come back with well over 1000kg's on my old commercial boat and have had the recreational guys come back with 2's and 3's. As the saying goes: "when in Rome, do as the Romans do!!" I cannot emphasize enough, WATCH the COMMERCIALS and steal with your eye's!!

Scenario 2

You get to the Point and see 20-30 boats all rushing up to a single spot. This is normally when they see birds working or another boat has just landed a fish. The boats will then be VERY close to each other, just drifting.

Simply join in!! Be very careful though. Smaller boats drift differently to larger boats, so boats drifting into each other is quite common. The commercials are a pretty rough bunch and I'd advise keeping well clear of them!!

Fishing technique is the same as fishing on anchor. Either drift lines or with sinkers, depending on the current and the depth the fish are feeding at. Remember to also leave one fish in the water, as long as possible!! This makes a huge difference. Instead of catching just that one fish, you can now get 10-20-30 fish off that school!!!