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Alex Bellissimo [00:00:10] Well, I was introduced to fishing. Fortunately, I had a mentor. Back in the very early days when I was a 13 year old, very dysfunctional 13 year old at that. And fortunately, he mentored me and taught me a lot of the intricacies of fishing. Back in the early days and then after that, I seek advice from wherever I could. And I just built up my my, my, what would you say? My repertoire of information throughout the years. OK, so it actually started in 2006. And I thought, well, you know, I'm going to give it a go. There's no one else to bring rock and bass fishing (unintelligible). Many people thought it was a very bad idea. I found that that was nearly the complete opposite. But I had to sell myself all the time. A lot of advertising, writing. Doing a bit of filming with uh I was fortunate enough to do some filming with some fishing shows. And I had support from a lot of fishing from the fishing tackle industry as well.

James Thull [00:01:29] Wonderful. So what, you specialize in in shore fishing? Tell me a little bit about the type of fishing.

Alex Bellissimo [00:01:38] That's right, it is shore fishing, rock fishing. Ocean rock fishing. Ocean beach fishing and estuary fishing. So the majority of my fishing outings are actually done on the ocean rocks and ocean beach with a smaller part done in the estuaries.

James Thull [00:01:57] Fishing bait, fishing lures?

Alex Bellissimo [00:01:58] Well, I'd actually do both bait and lures. Well, we catch a whole broad range of species depends on what's in season. So starting off in wintertime, right at the very end, in the winter, going into spring and now the warmer water species now in October, the end of October. So it's the winter species being Rock, Blackfish, Groper, Ludovic, trevalli, Tyler and Salmon. And now we're going into the more warmer species, which is whiting off the ocean beaches. Tyler and salmon, bream, snapper, kingfish, pelagics like bonito, mako, tuna and freegan. Mako will be coming on in coming months as well. That's the funny part about our salmon, they're actually not really a salmon, they just got called a salmon. So the Kiwis, the New Zealanders call them coweye. So they're actually not a salmon. They're not like the beautiful, delightful eating pink flesh salmon that you get from the States and so forth and Canada and New Zealand. But they are delightful fish. They are quite good to eat, although. Contrary to what people say, they they think they're pretty lousy. But I think they're pretty good, but I'm not too fussy at the same time either.

Alex Bellissimo [00:03:39] Many, many years ago, I done freshwater fishing as a young boy. I haven't done freshwater fishing for a long time with it.

James Thull [00:03:46] Would that have been trout that you went for?

Alex Bellissimo [00:03:48] Well, he was trout in the dams out west, about 150 kilometers west of Sydney, 200 kilometers west of Sydney. And that was about 30 years ago.

Alex Bellissimo [00:04:04] I don't know where to start. I really wouldn't know where to start. You mentioned tigerfish. That would be a magnificent fish to go for those massive kingfish you catch in NZ and New Zealand, those monstrous snapper you catch in New Zealand and South Australia. Just I don't know where to start.

James Thull [00:04:25] So you got a few on there?

Alex Bellissimo [00:04:26] Absolutely. Just catching a proper, authentic Atlantic salmon would be wonderful. And then roasting it on fire and just having the whole complete experience would just be amazing, wouldn't it? I would just love it. You know, so. And that's what fishing is all about. It's about the whole experience, isn't it? Yeah so. Going to Brazil and fishing for some of those weird species that they catch there.

James Thull [00:04:50] Arapaima and things like that?

Alex Bellissimo [00:04:53] Absolutely. Going to, I don't know, as I say, I don't know where to start.

Alex Bellissimo [00:05:05] It's a mix of both. I do have clients who just exclusively fish only catch and release. I do have anglers that fish for a fee to fish. Although I do encourage and to try and catch and release, that as well. Yeah, it's it's it's good for our future and our future stocks. Well, as you know, there's like a lot of species that don't grow very big. So if it happens to be a local fish called whiting which you catch off the beaches. A 30 centimeter whiting is a reasonable fish and a 40 centimeter fish is quite still quite common. And they, you'd be lucky to get get them over forty five centimeters. And then you get a fish called the kingfish or jewfish. And the legal size is 70 centimeters for a jewfish, which is also called mullet. And the king fish is sixty five centimeters. So they're quite sizeable fish anyway, a little bit over two feet, 60 centimeters. I mean, you would you would think that they're sizeable enough, but they're actually not. So you must release them. And that's it doesn't matter what state the fish is in. You must release them. So this is why I encourage my clients to actually bring the awareness to them that regardless of the size of the fish, if it's if it's very large preferably release it or if it's a little bit too small, even one centimeter or half a centimeter, I actually encourage them to actually release it. I'm not there to police it. At the same time, they do release it. So if I say, please, that fish needs to be released. I haven't had any, too many arguments in the past. Yeah, so.

Alex Bellissimo [00:06:53] It's funny that, you know, it's funny you say that. I've had I seen some quite substantial changes to the worse. Back in the late 80s and even the early 90s. And I've seen some vast improvements from those times to now. So the fishing can be quite good compared to what it was back in the early 90s even. I think it's because of more conservation minded anglers that are releasing those big breeding stocks. Those fish that aren't being overkilled, basically. So just for the sake of throwing them in the freezer to be freezer burnt at the end of the day, people are actually more mindful of what they're catching now. Yes. So that's the main reason why I think there's been an improvement. There has been some declines in some species. Without a doubt. We've got increasing volumes of anglers fishing. So some of the species have declined. No doubt about that. But some have improved. So it's it's a bit of a mix. Well, look, you can't see to the camera here, but there's a drain right here, for example. And that's runoff from the streets and so forth. And I'm really concerned about that. The runoff from the streets with all the brake, brake padding, the wearing out of tires, just general pollution and all that runoff is can be quite toxic to the fish. That's what I'm more concerned about having I, I think our fish stocks will be. We'll be there in the future. But will they be too toxic to eat in the future? Is my concern now also you get fish travel that vast distances as well. So even though it is perceived that fish are actually toxic in large cities, a lot of these fish are actually traveling hundreds of kilometers south and north, even some cases thousands of kilometers. And they're coming in to feed on on the small fish which have been feeding on the bottom and eating toxic food. So I'm quite concerned about that side of it. So as far as our fish stocks for the future. Quietly optimistic about it. But the pollution runoff from fuel and so forth and

as I mentioned, brakes and wearing down tires and just general. Toxic waste is my main concern.

Alex Bellissimo [00:09:30] Uh, it's really hard to say that. I'm really not too sure about that. OK, so I'm not exactly sure there's this there to be more erosion than there used to be. I'm not exactly sure, but then it actually revives itself. So they're saying it's eroded and then it comes back again. So it appears like that if you get dominating east swell for a number of years, you get lots of wear because it's fully impacting in right on the beaches, on the left and right side of it. If you get a southerly swell it will create far less impact on the southern corner, but a lot more impact on the northern corner of it. Therefore, you see a lot more erosion. And then people are jumping up and down about that. There's climate change and look at the erosion and all sorts of things happening. So so it's it's hard to. We've had some very dry years. Australia is in a severe drought at the moment. It's probably the worst drought probably in nearly in our history, although I've seen a drought which is very similar back in the late 70s as well, early 80s. So it's all it's hard to determine.

Alex Bellissimo [00:10:57] I love the challenge of it. You know, the anticipation, the excitement of it, the the technique involved. It keeps my mind working. I'm just I love it. I'm interested in it. I can't wait to fish for different species at different times of the year as well. You know, I can't wait for some of the winter species for when even though I'm going to start spouting off some species. Now, when the silver drummer start biting, when the big black drummer start biting, when the grouper are around, when the trevalli are around. And then we go into the summer species when the snapper, for example, I mean, I've been catching a few snapper recently and a few jewfish. A few kingfish. I just look forward to it every year. And you know something, I love maintaining my skill level and I love teaching people how to fish. I love seeing the big smiles on people's faces. I love seeing how people are feeling a lot more secure about being able to go out and fish for a specific species that they go and target. I've taught them how to fish for them. I just I just love fishing. I love the camaraderie of it. I love being out in. Near the ocean, I love the serenity that gives me peace of mind. It keeps me grounded as well. And this is some of the things.

Alex Bellissimo [00:12:31] No they're about the same, although women can be slightly easier than men because there's less ego going on. So you've gotta be aware of what's what's happening around you with your clients, you've got to sense things basically so you feel that your client's a bit edgy because I'm, hiring people are hiring me when they're a bit edgy or they're a bit stressed out and they're hiring me to learn fishing on their last port of call in some cases. So that being the case, eh? Yeah. They're not very patient. You know, a lot of the male clients can be lacking in patience or they, they might have a bit of ego going on. A lot of the female clients don't really have the ego side of it, but some people, whether you're male or female, are hard to teach. So I try and suggest as much as possible when I'm teaching them. So rather than telling them what to do, I actually suggest what to do. And they find it a lot more easy to balance and to be taught in that case.

James Thull [00:13:39] That's great that one of the things I've always, well, almost every guide that I've talked with says women are typically easier to teach than men because men will men try to muscle everything and and women will listen to what you're trying to tell them. But yeah.

Alex Bellissimo [00:13:56] Exactly right. It can be the case, it can be the case. But look, there's. If someone's gonna spend money on you to to be guided, they're quite humble people. I find them by and large, the majority of people were quite humble. Well, the thing is, we are getting a lot of people into the sport, a lot of young people, see. So my clients

age from about 10 to about 70 and there's all that age bracket in between, the majority of my clients are between 25 and 45. So you are quite correct there that we are getting a lot of. Matured men. Into fishing. But there is a lot of children that fish and there's a lot of older people that fish as well. So that's as far as that's concerned. I think there's a there's a good generation coming up now of young anglers. Well, what they're doing, they're actually policing better nowadays. They're actually going to be. They're actually doing a lot of studies on on species to determine whether or not they should be caught larger or less of. As far as breeding stocks are concerned and perhaps even in the future, I think they are going to be doing actually probably closed seasons as well, like they do with trout. So that's that's what I'm anticipating. There is areas that they've closed off, but we've tried to discourage that by having better policing rather than having closed off areas. In that case, being in closed off areas, people can sneak into these big closed off areas and and pillage the places. Rather, if they are open, they can be seen by the public, more so, especially by fishermen, which are educated. So they see someone doing the wrong thing, compared it to a person that doesn't fish. There don't know if that person is doing the wrong thing where an angler would know, know they're doing the wrong thing in these areas that would have been possibly closed off. Get better education. I'm part of the few educational programs myself, rock fishing safety workshops, which I do right throughout Sydney and we'll be doing down the south coast and north coast in the near future. I've been doing that for the last few years. We also have education on catch and release and how to better release a fish and if you're going to photograph a fish release it as quick as possible. Handle it with a wet cloth or wet hands. Without our, um, our body temperature is a lot warmer than theirs and be more friendly to the fish that you're catching.

Alex Bellissimo [00:17:04] Yeah, definitely, definitely. I do. Yes. So this is why I encourage my clients to release as many fish as possible rather than keeping as much as possible. And just to let them know that the resources will last far longer if they release a lot more fish rather than actually catching fish. Sure. And to better educate people. Because if people aren't educated, they're actually trying to become surgeons and trying to get that hook out of the fish when in actual fact, you're better off actually using a large hook and mouth hooking the fish rather than actually hooking it down too deep by using too small a hook, for example. That's just one, one example. By handling the fish without actually over handling it and getting that hook out in and out. Sometimes people try to manipulate the hook out of a fish and they use an unnecessarily unnecessary amount of pressure. Where it's not that it's not that hard to actually just hold the hole correctly and push a hook out and then release fish gently back into the ocean rather than use unnecessary pressure on the fish. I'm just giving you another example. Rehabilitate the fish in a pond for a few minutes before releasing it. I put it in the pond. Let it swim around then it had a bit of a breather before throwing it back into the ocean and being vulnerable. So a lot of people don't do that as well. Throwing the fish into whitewater rather than unbroken water. Because whitewater is a lot softer, for example. Throwing it in headfirst rather than splatting it. You know, it's like when we used to as young men and kids, we used to jump go off and jump and occasionally do us a splat on the stomach. It didn't feel real good. It doesn't feel real good to a fish either. So this is why you gotta catch and release fish correctly and actually try and speed the actual head into the water. That's just a few examples. Yes, a better education is a key I think.

Alex Bellissimo [00:19:06] Well, there's New South Wales fisheries for a start that does a. They are the main body that do all the research. There is a small lobby groups that put in recommendations, but New South Wales Fishery is a main, is a main body that does it. They got their scientists and their offices and so forth and they and they and their offices give give data back to the scientists. The scientists go out and do the research as well.

Well, it's a good, safe environment for a start. You know, there's a lot of places in the world is safe, obviously, but Australia's a good, safe environment. It's. Just a beautiful area to fish. It's it's still. Being a very young country is still quite pristine. The environment, this is it's beautiful. Just to be. It's a great adventure. So you've got steep rock cliffs. You got cliffs, which you might nearly see in the camera there, which are the big, large expanses of water. You can catch fish in 30 centimeters water and just wade around. You can spot them with your Polaroids. You got surf fishing. You got fresh water fishing only an hour and a half away from from the ah from the city. You got this broad range of species. My advice is to seek the right advice. Try and be kind to the fish as much as you can and only keep what you need. Use oversized hooks so you hook them in the mouth rather than hooking in too deep which will ensure that their release would be better for them. Look, even though fishing, I must admit, is cruel because we are hooking fish with sharp hooks, take into account that let's look at the groper, for example, they're eating sea urchins and you look in a groper's mouth it's got sea urchin spines in his mouth which fall out of its mouth. So the sea urchin spine is the more poisonous and more painful than a hook. I've had them in my fingers, for example. So if you hook a fish with a larger hook, you're ensuring the hook in them more so in the mouth rather than down too deep. Basically spread the news, educate as many people as possible.