



Starlo looking especially chuffed with his 'PB' barra—a wild, saltwater, fish of 126 cm and 50 old-fashioned pounds.

After waiting 22 years for his first metre-plus barra, **STARLO** cracks three in three days, culminating with a 50-pound monster. In an age when most really large barra seem to come from stocked impoundments, it's refreshing to hear that there's still some amazing action available on big, wild salties—if you can get the timing and location exactly right.

The topic of personal bests (or 'PBs') is a popular one amongst sport fishers. Most of us know what our own biggest bream, bass, trout or snapper either measured or weighed, and a few may remember the sizes of their mates' best specimens of these fish. In other circles, statistics on these subjects are collected, studied, swapped and debated like a first grade cricketer's run rates or bowling averages. Size, it seems, does matter.

Nowhere is this phenomenon more pronounced than in the tropical north of Australia, where the dimensions of one's best-ever barramundi are typically public knowledge and are openly discussed by others. Some Top End pundits take it all very seriously indeed, and carry a complex mental form guide of all their mates' PB barra marks, ranked in ascending order of size.

My mate Alex Julius, publisher of the phone-book-thick *NAFA Annual* and quarterly *Barra & Bass Digest* magazines, is a case in point. He can rattle off the PB barra lengths or weights of dozens of his colleagues and contributors with the same uncanny accuracy my wife exhibits when it comes to remembering the birthdays of distant relatives and casual acquaintances. It's truly phenomenal.

Despite having caught my first barra way back in 1981 (at Queensland's Hinchinbrook Island, under the able tutelage of Vic McCristal), and having made annual visits to the Top End since 1982, my own biggest barra has never really been large enough to register on Alex's *Lates calcarifer* radar, which is calibrated to reject targets under a metre in length. Over those 22 years, I've caught a lot of barra, but specimens exceeding the old-fashioned 20 lb mark (9 kg) remained few enough to count on one hand. I'd never even hooked a true giant. It seemed I was a sort of one-man big barra exclusion zone.

Just for the record, my PB barra up until March this year was actually an unmeasured 11