

A photograph of a fishing boat on the ocean at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and light blue. The water is dark blue with white-capped waves. In the foreground, two fishing rods are mounted on the boat. The rod on the right has a silver reel. The text 'The Therapy of Fish' is written in a white, cursive font on the right side of the image.

*The Therapy
of Fish*

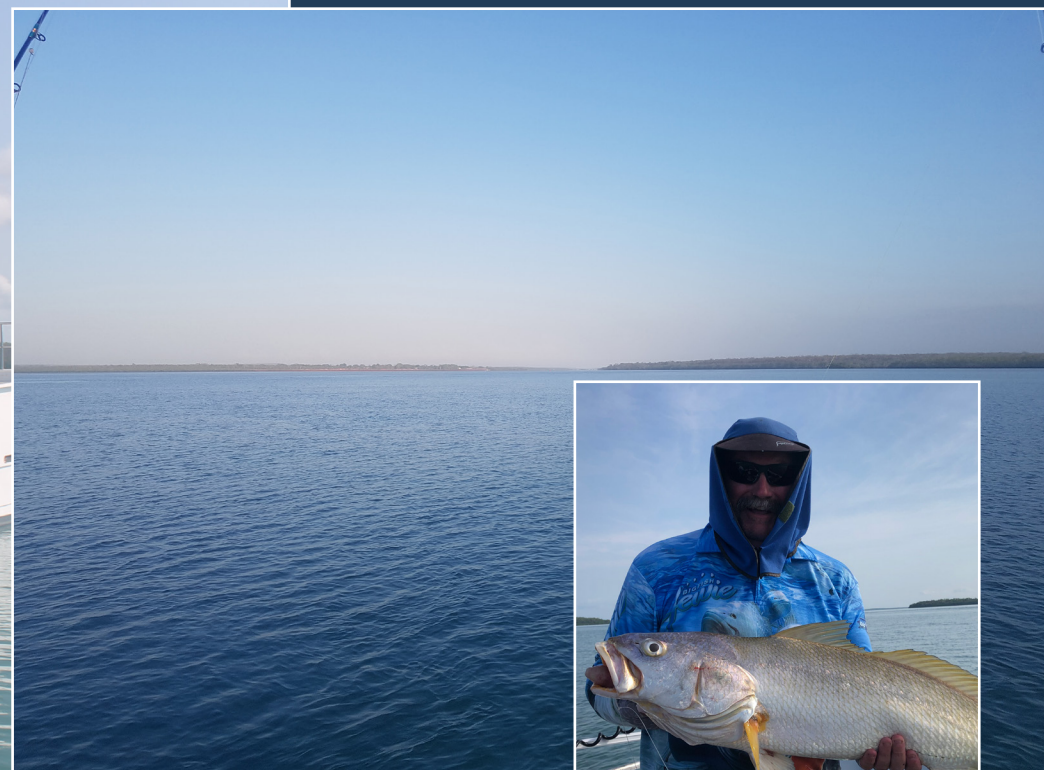
THE REELING VETERANS -
SAVING VETERANS ONE FISH
AT A TIME

The suicide rate for veterans in this country is more than double the national average. Yes, read that again, double the national average, with male veterans under 30 being at greatest risk. The number of suicides that have been reported are estimated to be much higher, however, between the years of 2001 and 2016, 373 veterans took their lives. This tragic loss of life amongst our veterans is at crisis level and has prompted calls for a Royal Commission into veteran suicide. It is painfully obvious that the care, support and services for our ex-servicemen and women are not meeting the complex needs of our veterans.

One organisation that is dedicated to addressing this epidemic is Reeling Veterans – Fishing for Therapy, located in Darwin in the Northern Territory. Founded and run by Michael Hurren, a veteran who suffers from PTSD himself, Reeling Veterans has a very simple idea at its core, fishing as a form of therapy.

Michael served in the army for 10 years, after two deployments to Afghanistan he returned home suffering the symptoms of PTSD and actively sought help and treatment. In his search for treatment he found that there was a lack of real and ongoing support for veterans suffering mental illness.

Michael's personal battle with PTSD and the experience of losing mates



to suicide were the driving forces behind the birth of Reeling Veterans. Michael found the best form of therapy for him was occurring out on the boat, throwing in a line and finding support amongst mates. He figured if this was helping him, it could help others too.

Since its inception in 2017, Reeling Veterans has gone from strength to strength and has helped many veterans through the very simple

therapy of fishing. PTSD manifests itself in many different ways and each case is very specific to the type of trauma that has been experienced. Many sufferers feel overwhelmed and may have withdrawn from those around them, finding it hard to leave the house or participate in daily activities. Michael has created and encourages a relaxed, easy-going environment that welcomes everyone.

Fishing as a form of therapy has struck a chord with many veterans around the country and it's easy to see why. The complete immersion in nature, the peace of throwing a line in the water and chatting to a mate are all activities that are relaxing and restorative. Reeling Veterans have people from all over Australia travelling to the Northern Territory to take part in their regular fishing trips and experience this open and easy going form of therapy.

Most recently, as part of Veterans Health Week, Reeling Veterans took 19 veterans out to the Tiwi Islands for a four day fishing trip. The beautiful Tiwi Islands, located 90km north of Darwin, are known for world class fishing and are fittingly referred to as the 'Island of Smiles'.

After many months of planning, the crew headed out in the early hours of the morning of the 24th of October into the blue azure waters of the Northern Territory. Out of the 19 veterans on board, 3 had attempted suicide in the past few months.

The trip was an opportunity for these veterans to take time out, make some new friends, catch a few fish and if they wanted to, open up about their own battle. It isn't a requirement to talk about what you have been through or experienced, however Michael says the relaxed nature of the environment and being with people who have a shared experience and background tends to allow people to feel safe to do so.

The testimonials from the veterans who went on the trip are full of gratitude for the experience. For many the trip was life changing and provided a much-needed respite from the personal struggles at home. Time spent with like-minded people out in the open air was a reminder that there is life to be lived. The opportunity to put the worries of everyday life aside, put themselves out of their comfort zone and form strong bonds was priceless.

The same sense of comradeship and

Clockwise from the top: The mothership - Sea Eagle; The blue waters of the Tiwi's; Plenty of big fish were caught; Heading out for the day; The Reeling Veterans boat; The smile only a big barra can bring.





safety that many veterans have found amongst new friends on the water, with a fishing rod in their hands, is the same on land. Reeling Veterans recognises that the people who support those suffering are in need of support too. The partners, family and friends of veterans are all welcome at the Reeling Veterans. It is all about community supporting community. Fundraising events provide opportunities for members to get together and the group runs monthly catch ups at the Darwin Trailer Boat Club, information nights and regular fishing. They also have a private group on their Facebook page where veterans can go to find information or a mate to fish with.

Placing the issue of mental illness and suicide amongst veterans on the national agenda is of key importance for the organisation. Finding as many opportunities to spread the word and provide support for veterans is the objective behind all that they do. In light of this, they have secured a spot in one of Australia's best fishing competitions next year called 'Girls Gone Fishing'. The competition will be held in April on the Daly River in the Northern Territory. Reeling Veterans are sending a team of women to the event to help promote the importance of mental health and ending the stigma that goes with it.

The four day fishing trips run by Reeling Veterans are heavily reliant on fundraising efforts and local

business sponsorship. The veterans that go along are completely catered for, from accommodation through to food and fishing gear. If you don't live in the NT, the only thing you need to pay for is your travel to Darwin. Michael and his team will look after the rest.

In addition to the fishing trips run by Reeling Veterans, Dhipirri Barra and Sportsfishing lodge in Arnhem Land have partnered up to run four additional, all inclusive trips per year. They also have some fantastic sponsorship from Formosa Boats, Quality Marine, Bunbier trailers and Suzuki Marine Nautilus Insurance. Without this much needed sponsorship Reeling Veterans

would not be able to provide the life changing support to the veterans they count amongst their members and future members.

Funding is such a critical issue in terms of providing support and services for veterans suffering from PTSD. The Reeling Veterans are a registered charity and as such all donations are tax deductible. If you are able to support this incredible organisation in the work they do to prevent veteran suicide, head to their website to donate. To find out more about upcoming events or contact details head to:

www.reelingveterans.com.au or their Facebook page

