

## THE AUSTRALIAN

# Catching your own squid is a bit like shooting fish in a barrel

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The thing about squid – if you’re in the right place at the right time – is they require no real talent to catch. I’m living proof. You cast a jig, retrieve it in a kind of gentle pull-wind motion, and they just can’t resist throwing their tentacles around the barbs in a passionate embrace. It’s not so far from shooting fish in a barrel.

And of course they’re worth catching because they are fabulous to eat, in so many ways. But as anyone who has caught one will tell you, they have a final party trick just so you know they didn’t totally wave the white flag saying “I surrender, cook me.”

We were sitting on the back of the good ship *Floating Liability*, about 300m offshore, celebrating our good fortune and the fact that nothing on the boat had broken that week with a drink as the sun went down. I was casting with my new \$15 Aldi telescopic rod/reel combo (I think the jig cost more) when the distinctive drag of an entangled *Sepioteuthis australis*, commonly known as southern calamari squid, excited my hitherto uninitiated kit. It was a decent size, too. Naturally, Kate said throw it back; she thinks squid are the same as octopus and that octopus are all Harvard graduates. I was more swayed by the “legitimate hunting and gathering of an abundant species for personal consumption” argument.

So I kept the squid in the water on the jig for a while, where it huffed and puffed and squirted like a faulty fire-pump; after a while, I suppose I thought the ink – which obviously I’d love to capture but don’t know how – had been shot. It hadn’t.

In my attempt to dispatch the squid as humanely as possible, I inserted a sharp-pointed blade between the eyes – triggering a ferocious retaliatory ejaculation of briny, viscous ink everywhere. Our clothes, the cockpit, inside the cabin... You can hardly blame the squid. But it was some clean-up.

Back home, it was a matter of separating the edible from the fertiliser, so here's a few dos and don'ts: do use as much of the creature as you can, including the skin. There's plenty of edible muscle around the "head" too. Don't use water: wipe the cavity of the cowl with paper towel only. Rinsing just dilutes everything, and tap water is full of stuff your squid doesn't like.

Separate the "wings" and tentacles and anything else you reckon is fair game and coarsely chop it; rub your cleaned cowl, or tube, with some olive oil and smoked Spanish paprika. Then, using short-grained rice like carnaroli or bomba, make a kind of Spanish risotto with chopped red capsicum, chopped tomato and more paprika. Fresh mild chilli is good, too, and for liquid, use those prawn heads you froze last week as a kind of rapid-fix stock. When the rice is almost done, throw in the squid bits, stir, season and turn off the heat; let it cool to firm up. Then stuff as much of it inside the tube as you can; secure with toothpicks.

You have two options: braise the squid in a nice roasted tomato sauce, or simply barbecue the thing, like I did. The sauce is a more complete meal, but the grilled version, sliced with a green salad and olive-oil potatoes, works a treat.

Now, I appreciate we can't all hunt and gather, but you might pay \$25 at the fishmongers for a decent specimen of fresh squid. Makes the \$15 rod look like a good buy.

### **JOHN LETHLEAN, FOOD WRITER**

John Lethlean is Australia's only national restaurant critic. A journalist by trade, food and wine lover by disposition, John has written full-time about restaurants, food and the people involved with this exci... [Read more](#)