

Small Kayak Fishing

By Jason Walker



This article is about heading out for a fishing session on a kayak, not an all singing all dancing dedicated fishing kayak but a common old run of the mill family kayak that is normally reserved for the kids to play on down at the beach during the summer.

As we have all seen kayak fishing is a huge growth sport in New Zealand. More and more people are realising that fishing from a kayak offers many benefits over the traditional boat fishing: Low to zero running costs, no motor to service on a kayak, no trailer to warrant and register every year, and you don't have to take out a small bank loan to fill it up with fuel at the gas station every time you want to go fishing. There's no lengthy wash down and flush after every trip, and it doesn't sit on the driveway reminding your better half that there's a huge chunk of change sitting there not being used.

There's still one hurdle to get over, whether it's a boat or a kayak you have chosen as your fishing platform, the initial purchase outlay. The difference in spend is worlds apart even between the most basic of boats and a top of the range fishing kayak. Most top end fishing kayaks will see your bank account lighter by around \$3000 - \$4000 whereas a boat is only limited by the size of your bank account but even a mid range boat setup could see you parting with ten times the amount you would spend on a kayak.

Although with all that said and done even the dedicated fishing kayak is out of some people's reach, the current economic climate is seeing some families on very tight budgets and as much as dad would like a fishing kayak the "fun/toy" budget won't stretch that far but there is a few hundred

dollars in the account to spend on the kids this summer, they love being at the beach and playing in the water as many a good Kiwi does so hey why not get them a kayak? Well, that's just great the kids get a kayak but dad can't have one to go fishing on, or can he...?

A kayak for the family is a kayak that can be used by all the family for more than one purpose if you purchase well and are prepared to do a bit of DIY (or get your local Canoe & Kayak store to do it), and make a few compromises. I'll now try and show you how you can take a quality NZ made family kayak and head out fishing from it.

In this example I've selected a Frenzy kayak from Ocean Kayak, one of their most popular models. It's the typical family / kids kayak you'll see at many a beach during the summer and is a staple item at the kiwi bach, The Frenzy although targeted at the kids market is still a capable kayak for many dads to paddle with a manufacturers capacity rating of up to 145 kg, it weighs in under 20 kg making moving it around is a breeze off the water and only measures 2.7 m long making it extremely manoeuvrable and easy to paddle but hey it was designed for kids to use so it should be easy for dad to use too!

There is one simple thing that changes a kayak from just 'a kayak' to 'a fishing kayak' - the rod holder - and as I'll show you they are easy to fit. Armed with nothing more than a cordless drill, a hole saw, and a drill, you can have a rod holder on your family kayak but why stop there, we always need a back up rod so let's fit two.



Step 1

Find a good flat area on the kayak to fit the rod holder. You want somewhere flat so that when you screw down the rod holder it gives a good seal to keep the water out. You'll also need to ensure there is enough depth for the rod holder to clear the hull. A good place is behind you so they do not interfere with your paddle stroke. Using the rod holder gasket we mark the kayak where the holes need to be drilled.

Step 2

Drill out the centre hole using your hole saw, remove any burrs and dry fit the rod holder marking the screw holes that need to be drilled. To affix the rod holder you have several options available to you: self tapping screws, rivets, and well nuts, each has their pros and cons. In this case we have used well nuts as these give the best and the most waterproof seal.



Step 3

Fit the rod holder and screw it in tight.

That's it you're done, how easy was that? Now you can carry on and add more rod holders as you see fit. For this kayak we fitted two one on each side at the rear. Of course if you are DIY challenged or just don't want the pressure of doing this to your prized family kayak then have a chat to your friendly kayak retailer as most will be more than happy to help you out with this.



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Restricted space

Fishing kayaks are already restricted for space compared to boats but small kayaks are restricted even more, so you have to get creative or realistic with the amount of gear you can take with you, I personally softbait and lure fish so I was able to put a couple of spare jigheads, braid scissors, and a small spool of fluorocarbon leader in the pocket of my PFD and a pot of softbaits in the kayak footwells.



Get Creative

Many smaller kayaks don't have a paddle keep, but it fitted easily under the front bungie which held the paddle while I fished.

So, can you hit the water yet? Yes you can but there's safety points to keep in mind that apply to all fishing kayaks whether purchased as one or the newly converted family kayak.




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PFD / Lifejacket

Please always wear a PFD or lifejacket when using your kayak. Your kayak may be stable and you feel safe in it but there is no telling when or for whatever reason you may end up out of your kayak and in the water. It may be a rogue wave or you've simply leaned out too far. If you are wearing a correctly fitting PFD then you are still safe and can proceed to re-board your kayak. It is now the law in many areas.

Leash it!

There is a simple saying in the kayak fishing community "leash it or lose it", if you want to keep it leash it to your kayak. A leash connects your precious rod and reel and paddle (the most important) to your kayak so should you find yourself in the situation where the kayak rolls over everything is attached to the kayak and not sinking to the sea floor!



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Communications

Whenever you venture offshore in any craft you should always take at least one form of communication with you, this can be as simple as a mobile phone (in a waterproof case) but much better is a VHF radio. There are many handheld VHF radios on the market these days that are more than capable of doing the job and reasonably priced. Look for a submersible model if possible. Alternatively all you need to buy is a good quality VHF dry bag so you can use it out on the water with the confidence that it's not going to die on you from getting wet. Ensure that whatever means of communications you take, that they are attached to you or your PFD rather than the kayak. In the worst case scenario you will need to raise the alarm with the Coastguard. If you have become separated from your kayak you can make the call; a VHF sitting on the kayak will never raise the alarm for you!

Clothing

The same can be said for any sport, the correct clothing can make it or break it for you and you need to dress for the conditions. Kayaking is no different, above all else you need to keep warm and/or dry. In the winter a good set of kayak splash pants and top will ensure you keep the water off and stay warm and dry. In the summer you may find that the winter clothing is too hot and you can shed the heavy waterproof clothing and opt for more lightweight gear. Many of us will still keep the splash pants on but swap the top for a long sleeved rash or quick dry top instead. Also in the summer be very aware of the sun and make sure you apply plenty of sun screen, the sea actually reflects a lot of the UV back up at you so make sure you apply it under your chin too.

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Trip Report

Kayak fishing can be a group activity but due to the fact that we are most of the time paddling around in a single person kayak it also lends itself to being a solo activity and sees many of us heading offshore alone for a fishing session. We need to make sure that someone or some people know what our intentions are. This can be as simple as a two minute conversation with your better half letting them know where you are heading, and when you expect to return, other alternatives include a two minute form.

As you can see there is plenty for you think about on how you could get involved in kayak fishing by making use of family kayaks you already own or at least plant a seed for when you are thinking about what toys you buy the family next summer.

Alternative – Kayak Kontiki

Whilst working at the recent Hutchwilco Boat Show in Auckland it was pointed out to me that an electric kontiki retailer was selling their package for around \$3000 – that to me sounded like a huge chunk of change. Not all of that \$3000 was for the kontiki itself but also the backbone, hooks, winch etc, so you could replace the kontiki part with a kayak. Now that you've made your fishing kayak you don't just have to use it for rod and line fishing you could turn it from a solo fishing kayak to a family fishing session by using the kayak to tow out a long line straight off the beach. A longline can be a great family activity especially now that dad can paddle the line out, drop it off and paddle back to shore, let the line soak for 30-60 minutes and then get the kids involved in winching the line back in and collecting the catch.

So how did we get on in the converted kayak? After fitting the two rod holders I hit the water with two of the guys from Ocean Kayak, we headed to a spot about one kilometre off Army Bay, Whangaparaoa to see if I could catch a fish from the Frenzy. The other two guys were both in proper

fishing kayaks, including one loaded with electronics, so I was definitely up against it. The fishing proved hard and after about an hour and a half no one had had a bite never mind land a fish. Between us we'd tried softbaits, pilchards and trolling lures. I'd only been using softbaits up to this point, but I did have a small 20g Jitterbug on my second rod so time to give it a go. First three or four drops nothing, then on the next a small tug. Excitement got the better of me, out the window went all the Inchiku rules and I struck hard, of course losing the fish. Ah well, at least now I knew there were fish down there! A couple more drops and some more taps then BAM! The rod loads up and there is a fish on the line, a short but fun fight followed and up pops a 32 cm snapper. Not huge but it was all that was needed to prove the point that the Frenzy worked as a fishing platform, it also gave one of the Ocean Kayak guys dinner that evening.

So if you've been thinking of giving kayak fishing a go but don't have access to a fully-fledged fishing kayak don't be afraid of giving it a go in the family kayak, I hope to see you out on the water some time.



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