



Whether you're pleasure fishing or competing in an offshore tournament, having the right bait often means making your own. But time spent making bait can take away from time spent fishing. If you're after more bait in less time, take my advice and...

# LET THERE BE LIGHT

*By Captain Alex Edwards  
Angel and the Badman II*



# “You can’t have light without a dark to stick it in.”

Silly quote? Maybe, but Arlo Guthrie’s words cut to the heart of what this article is all about... darkness and light. Dark is dark... deep, inky and predominantly lifeless. Dark does little to entice creatures of the deep and even less to excite them. Stick a little light into the dark and things change. Shove a ton of light down dark’s throat and things can get crazy. But, what does it take to effectively force-feed sufficient light into the murky depths?

The right set of underwater lights.



It was during the off-season of 2010 that my owner decided to take things up another notch on his boat Angel and the Badman II – a 48 foot custom Cavileer aboard which we took first place in the 2007 Bisbee’s Black & Blue. Hauled out for major refits in our home port of San Diego, she’d be on the receiving end of a marine version of “Extreme Makeover.” It was during that haul out that I educated myself on the latest and greatest in underwater lighting systems – something that I’ve always wanted to add to the boat’s impressive collection of fish killing technology.

At first, it seemed that the choices available were more of a brand name preference than a selection based on features that stood out from the crowd. While I was familiar with the majority of brands out there, none had what I was looking for... the ability to not only light up the water below me, but the ability to do so with control. My search soon ended with the discovery of **DeepSea Power and Light**, a San Diego based manufacturer of cutting-edge underwater lights for marine applications.

To date, DeepSea remains the only underwater lighting manufacturer who lays claim to lights that strobe on demand with the added benefit of dimmer controls. Okay, so a strobe setting isn’t anything new, but dimmer control you say? That’s right, you can adjust light levels by way of a simple dimmer switch... just like the kind you might have at the old homestead. Now, not only can we shove lots of light down dark’s throat, we can send a whisper of illumination its way should we so please. You might be thinking “Big deal” ... but trust me when I tell you it’s a huge advantage.

After the installation was complete and ABM II was back in the water, I could immediately see that the new lights would pan out to be one of the best

investments made to improve our fishing platform. Heck, a flick of a switch and a mere minutes wait was all it took to draw marine life to the transom – all the while just sitting at the docks! What was lifeless water was soon teeming with bait. All I could think about was what these lights could do in fish rich territories like the Baja.

Our first true test of the new lights came in July of 2010. We start each tournament season on Baja’s East Cape with the Bisbee’s East Cape Offshore tournament being our official kick-off event. We moored off of the Van Wormer Resorts where the owner took quarters at the swanky Villas de Cortez. The crew and I would stay aboard ABM II.

Days leading up to the tournament start were put to good use with loads of pre-fishing but the highlight moments came during what is normally a less-than-stellar experience... making bait. It started when we were on the pick, moored a couple hundred feet off the beach. With a flick of a switch the full power of the new DeepSea lights came to bear upon the black water around us turning ebony to shimmering, translucent green. With it, bait, lots of bait.

Not all bait is created equal. Different baits outperform others at different times of the year and often vary from one day to the next depending on prevailing conditions. So, to be best prepared for what’s on tap, I prefer a variety of baits be in the tanks. If mackerel is what the fish want, I better have some. If sardines are the preferred snack, I want them too. It’s that ability to attract variety that can move dimmable lights from the realm of “ooh, that’s pretty” to “damn, that’s effective!!”

One evening, the crew and I decided to pull the anchor and make our way offshore to hunt for bait. Once in an area that usually holds decent numbers of

bait fish, we started with the “big” lights... HID’s that push light far and wide and deep. That gets the whole process started. The idea is to raise the ocean’s smallest creatures – plankton, phytoplankton, copepods, and all manner of tiny sea critters that make up the first rung of the food chain. Once they appear, the big lights are cut off and the dimmable LED’s do the rest. Soon, bait of all kinds began to amass and feast upon those tiny critters.

It’s at that point in the game that the dimming feature comes into play. All the lighting systems I found offered just two settings... on or off. Problem is that sometimes “on” is too much light. Too much light tends to push preferred baits to the edge where darkness gives them cover. What we found was with the LED’s up full the small hunters like mackerel, cabbies, ballyhoo, and other good pitch baits hung way out of range of our Sabikis or spoons. By simply dimming the LED’s, we could watch them come tighter and tighter to the boat, and ultimately into our bait tanks. If we wanted more mackerel, we just adjusted the light to bring them where we wanted them... it seemed that we could coax preferred bait to wherever we chose, whenever we chose. This would certainly make the boss happy!

Perhaps the most dramatic effects of light manipulation we encountered occurred whenever we cut the “big” lights leaving only the LED’s on, often quite low. Within seconds, bait would jump clear out of the water...



*DeepSea's 12 LED On-Hull SeaLite® was created for boat owners that want to dramatically illuminate the water behind their boat, without installing a fitting through the transom. Special circuitry allows them to double as a fish attracting strobe light with the flick of a switch and also includes an exclusive dimming feature. Plus, no bulb maintenance is required!*

Over the course of the next few weeks we spent time on seamounts and banks, points and rock piles, each time amazed at the procession of sea life lured in by simply manipulating the intensity of light. Candy bar squid, skipjacks, giant Humboldts... even reef species and tropicals! Perhaps the most dramatic effects of light manipulation we encountered occurred whenever we cut the “big” lights leaving only the LED’s on, often quite low. Within seconds, bait would jump clear out of the water putting on one heck of a show. They’d simply fly out of the water as if an insatiable leviathan from the deep was coming, mouth agape, to gulp them all down.

Some say that ten percent of the captains catch ninety percent of the fish. I don’t know if the numbers hold up but I do know successful captains are prepared for whatever opportunities present themselves. They’ll go to battle fully-armed with the right bait and tilt the odds in their favor. I guess you could say it’s very much like going to a knife fight with a gun. In this case, the captain may be the gun, but the bait is the ammo. Get the right bait and you’re one step closer to success. The difference between having perfectly maintained bait and beat up spooked out bait is another factor that gives an edge to a well-drilled team of anglers.

There’s a variety of ways to achieve better bait awareness – and many crews and captains have figured out just what it takes to get the right bait on the boat. It could be as easy as buying some fin bait from the bait guys, or, when that’s not an option, going out and doing some work with the lights. If I had my way, I’d prefer to fish baits I’ve made myself. Why? It’s back to that control thing. I can target the type of bait(s) I want, and

when I get it, I can take proper care of it. Fresh, properly cured and cared for bait gets bit when freaked-out, carelessly handled baits sit and soak.

So, the next time you pull up to a bait boat, take a moment to think about how much more rewarding would your fishing days would be if you made your own. Casting those baits atop the heads of your target species and seeing them take YOUR bait is very satisfying. Knowing you did the work that made it happen is even more so.

Hanging a double or triple with the baits you yourself caught is undeniably satisfying, loads of fun too! Sure, it's easy to crawl up on a pangero selling sticks at 2 to 4 bucks a pop. Okay, you'll probably still catch fish. But, what about catching more fish in more places?

On a return trip to Diego in early 2011, we stopped to make mackerel in Mag Bay, used it on the ridge and on the banks north of Cabo, and then returned to San Diego to let it go. Lately, the mackerel and small fin bait have been harder to come by, in both Cabo and San Jose, and that condition may not change. We found the best alternative is to make our own up the line and bring it with us. With a good set of lights, and the ability to control them, you can step out of the "no bait" box and into a pelagic smorgasbord.

I've often said that some of the most enjoyable fishing is bait fishing, whether it is for fifteen-pound tuna or perfect pitch-baits. Of course, the ultimate reward is to raise some beast with the bait you spent all that time catching. Or in our case, all that bait we spent so little *fishing* time catching! If you're serious about your fishing, get yourself some DeepSea lights and draw bait like moths to flame. For more info, visit DeepSea online: [www.deepsee.com](http://www.deepsee.com). ~

