

Reconnecting River Country

Fact sheet - recreational fishers asked to have their say

Healthy rivers for happy fish

There is nothing better than an afternoon spent fishing at your local river or creek. The thrill of the catch is a great reward for hours of patience and persistence.

Catching a Murray Cod or a Golden Perch is the ultimate prize, but they can be hard to find.

Native fish numbers in the Murray-Darling Basin are estimated to be around 10 per cent of pre-European settlement levels.

But there are ways we can help to improve native fish numbers.

We can:

- expand their habitat
- boost river productivity
- provide more opportunities for native fish to breed.

To do this, river operators need the flexibility to manage flows above current 'constraints'. A constraint is any physical, policy or operational barriers limiting the movement of water for river and wetland health.

The Reconnecting River Country Program is an opportunity to address these constraints and manage water more efficiently to support native fish numbers and the recreational fishing industry.

This is why we want to work together with local recreational fishers to come up with the most effective solutions for the river.

Have your say

Recreational fishing is a billion-dollar industry in NSW.

For inland fishers, the Murray Cod and Golden Perch are the top target species.

Improving their numbers will mean better fishing and increased interest in the sport, bringing greater investment in local towns.

Research by Deloitte Access Economics found a 10 per cent increase in native fish numbers would lead to a five per cent increase in recreational fishing expenditure. This equates to an additional spend of approximately \$11 million in the Murray Catchment and \$4 million in the Murrumbidgee Catchment each year.

As well as the economic benefits, recreational fishing is well known for its positive health and wellbeing effects.

Why do native fish need our help?

Native fish need access to a variety of habitat throughout their lifetime so they can feed, breed, grow and move.

Many floodplain creeks and wetlands have become disconnected from the rivers that once provided regular flows, or now receive these flows too infrequently to meet the life cycle requirements of native fish.

The Reconnecting River Country Program will allow water managers to reinstate some of these flows and restore access for wildlife, particularly

native fish, which use wetlands and creeks for breeding and as nursery sites for young fish.

The program ultimately aims to increase the area of habitat available to native fish by:

- giving native fish regular opportunities to move into off-channel wetlands and low-lying floodplains for breeding and feeding. These environments provide important nursery habitat for juvenile fish, with warmer water temperatures, plenty of food and protection from predators. Many species rely on regular access to off-channel habitats to complete their life cycles
- increasing opportunities for larger freshes (flow pulses) to promote movement of all native fish and support large scale spawning of Golden Perch and Silver Perch.

How do higher flows provide more food for fish?

When water moves across the floodplain it triggers the release of carbon and other nutrients from the floodplain floor – providing food for fish.

Relaxing constraints will trigger the release of carbon and nutrients from the floodplain floor more often, fuelling food webs beginning with aquatic consumers like fungi and bacteria. Wetland plants will also grow better providing food resources for larger animals including native fish, frogs, turtles and waterbirds. An improved food supply will support the health of these water-dependant animal populations in the Murray and Murrumbidgee valleys. This means more native fish like Murray Cod and Golden Perch for recreational fishers.

Relaxing constraints is also expected to:

- increase the available wetland nursery habitats in both the Murrumbidgee and Murray catchments
- increase food availability

- expand the number of streams in the Edward-Wakool System where large freshes can be delivered to promote spawning.

What happens next?

Recreational fishers now have an opportunity to learn more about the program and have a say on river flow options.

In the coming months, we will provide a variety of opportunities to interact with the program including face-to-face meetings, online engagement, information packs, community snapshots and surveys.

The views of recreational fishers are an important component of the program. We look forward to working with you.

For more information visit the program website. This is a dedicated website providing regular updates and access to a range of fact sheets. You can also register for updates, ask a question and learn more about the program as the community collaboration process continues.

Acknowledgement

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and the Department of Regional NSW's Local Land Services acknowledge we stand on Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and we show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work. We, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically.

Find out more

Website	dpie.nsw.gov.au/reconnecting-river-country-program
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