

Re-establishing Macquarie Perch in the Ovens River

A multi-agency and community approach to restoring threatened native fish populations

The Ovens River and status of native fish populations

The Ovens River remains one of the few largely unregulated systems in the Murray Darling Basin, maintaining its natural flow and temperature regimes. This, and its relatively healthy in-stream and riparian habitats have contributed to the Lower Ovens being formally recognised as a Heritage River.

Despite this status, the Ovens River, like most of the Murray Darling Basin, has undergone dramatic reductions in the distribution and abundance of its native fish populations.

Key threats to the long-term survival of the Ovens River fish community include ongoing impacts from historical de-snagging e.g. reduced native fish breeding and recruitment, pest species e.g. carp, unregulated stock access, degraded riverbank vegetation, poor water quality and illegal fishing.



Healthy Ovens River habitat.

Photo: Glen Johnson

Restoration activities

Multiple restoration actions have been undertaken to address threats to river health and ultimately improve native fish populations in the region. In the Ovens River, state and federal agencies as well as community groups have invested heavily in rehabilitation works and community education activities to improve the Ovens Rivers' capacity to restore and maintain its native fish community.

These actions include fencing off stock access to the river; an improved fish way next to the Wangaratta weir; aquatic and riparian weed control, river bank revegetation; placing 'snags' (logs) into the river for fish habitat; pest control and restocking of threatened native species by hatchery production and translocations.

Re-establishing threatened fish populations

Macquarie perch *Macquaria australasica* and Trout cod *Maccullochella macquariensis* are native species which were historically abundant in the lower and mid Ovens River. Both species have undergone dramatic declines to the point where they were considered locally extinct in the Ovens River, and are now formally listed as nationally endangered species.

A recent intensive stocking program accompanied by robust scientific research resulted in the successful re-introduction of a now self-sustaining population of trout cod in the Ovens River. Macquarie perch are next in line, with a five year stocking program using fingerlings produced by Fisheries Victoria at the Snobs Creek fish hatchery and direct translocations of sub-adult fish from the healthy Lake Dartmouth population. The fingerlings and translocated fish will generate a range of age and developmental stages similar to that which exist in natural populations. This is an important first step toward re-establishing a self-sustaining Macquarie perch population with the long-term goal of creating a sustainable recreational fishery for the species.

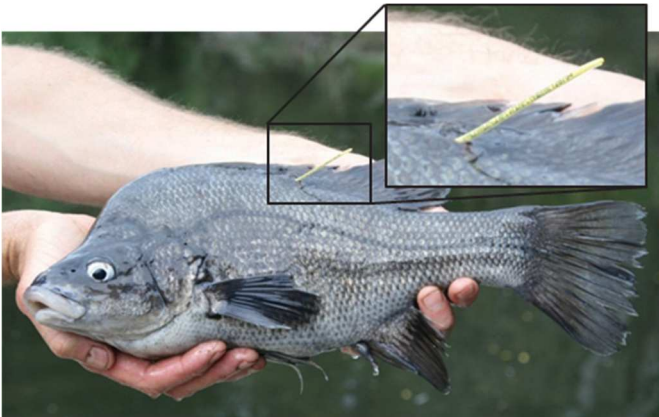


Adult Macquarie perch ready for release.

Photo: Jarod Lyon

All adult fish translocated into the river will be tagged with a unique coded yellow external tag which enables the identification of recaptured fish, either by future surveys or by recreational fisherman. Fishermen are urged to report any captures of tagged fish via the reporting number listed on the tag. Note that the taking or possession of Macquarie perch from the Ovens River is prohibited. Please support these rehabilitation activities and release these fish unharmed so these species can once again thrive in the region.

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Translocated fish with coded yellow tag.

Photo Jarod Lyon

All stocked fingerlings will be chemically marked to enable researchers to distinguish them from wild fingerlings produced from future breeding and recruitment events.



Fingerling's released into the Ovens River.

Photo Glen Johnson

Macquarie perch facts

Scientific name:	<i>Macquaria australasica</i>
Maximum size:	Approx. 2.5 kg and 50 cm.
Colouration:	Varies from tan to (more commonly) dark purplish- grey to black.
Shape:	Elongated, deep, and laterally compressed body.
Fins:	Rounded caudal and anal fin; soft dorsal fin.
Mouth:	Relatively small.
Eyes:	Relatively small with distinct silver or white iris.

Project partners and supporting groups

This program forms part of a multi-agency and community approach to restoring the Ovens River and its native fish populations. Partners and supporting groups include the:

- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)
- DELWP Hume Region
- DELWP Arthur Rylah Institute (ARI)
- Fisheries Victoria
- North East Catchment Management Authority (NECMA)
- Ovens Landcare Network and groups
- Myrtleford and District Sports Fishing Club
- Wangaratta and District Sports Fishing Club
- Wangaratta Fly Fishing Club
- Wangaratta Sustainability - Restoring our Waterways Group
- Rural City of Wangaratta and Alpine Shire Council
- VRFish (Victorian Recreational Fishing Peak Body)
- North East Angling Association
- Native Fish Australia (Vic)
- Australian Government and Murray Darling Basin Authority

This project is jointly funded by the Victorian Government, recreational fishing licence fees and the Target One Million Plan, and the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme, in collaboration with the North East Catchment Management Authority and DELWP's Arthur Rylah Institute.

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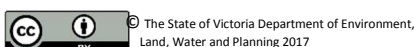
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