

# Freshwater Fisheries Management Update

## Fish Habitat and Flows Roundtable

## Statewide Recreational Fishing Roundtable

1 September 2020

### Native Fish Report Cards

- Our RFL Large Grant project bid to continue the Native Fish Report Cards Program for the next two years was supported!
- The collaborative monitoring program with DELWP is worth over \$750,000, including a \$120,000 contribution from RFL, so it's good value for anglers.
- The program contracts ARI researchers to survey 9 different native freshwater species in priority rivers and gives us unprecedented native fish population health data to track our fisheries, assess management interventions.
- Presented in report cards, the data engages anglers in native fishery improvements and assists in national stock status of these species (underway).
- The rivers and species to be monitored over the next two years include:
  - Goulburn River– Murray cod, golden perch, silver perch & trout cod
  - Ovens River – Murray cod, golden perch, Macquarie perch & trout cod
  - Gunbower Creek – Murray cod, golden perch, silver perch & trout cod
  - Lindsay-Mullaroo – Murray cod, golden perch, & silver perch
  - Gellibrand River – Blackfish
  - Glenelg River – Estuary perch
  - Mitchell River – Australian bass
  - Thomson-Macalister – Australian bass (DELWP In-kind)
  - Wimmera River – Golden perch, catfish (DELWP In-kind)



**Native Fish Report Card – 2019: Murray cod**

This report card describes the status of Murray cod in four streams in 2019 and trends in key population performance measures that are based on scientific data provided by scientific fishery surveys.

**OVERALL RATING - 2019:** Very good (improving)

Performance measures (health indicators)	Stream				Status <sup>1</sup>
	Gou	Gun	L&M	Ove	
<b>Stock abundance</b> Trend in abundance the last 3 years as indicated by trend in average annual catch rate from electro-fishing surveys	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
<b>Fish size (length/age)</b> Wide range of fish size classes present in recent three years, indicating regular successful spawning events and recruitment to the population.	✓	✓	Some	✓	✓
Mature fish present, as indicated by the presence of fish over 55 cm in the catch.	Some	✓	Some	✓	Some
Signs of recent recruitment, as indicated by the presence of fish under 10 cm.	✓	✓	Some	✓	✓
Signs of sustainable fishing pressure as indicated by the presence of fish approaching maximum size (> 100 cm).	Some	Some	Some	✗	Some

2. ⬆ = Increasing, yes and positive. ⬇ = Decreasing, no and negative. ⬆ = Stable. ? = Insufficient information.  
 ✓ = Good numbers present. Some = Some present. ✗ = Nil present.  
 \* May include stocked fish.

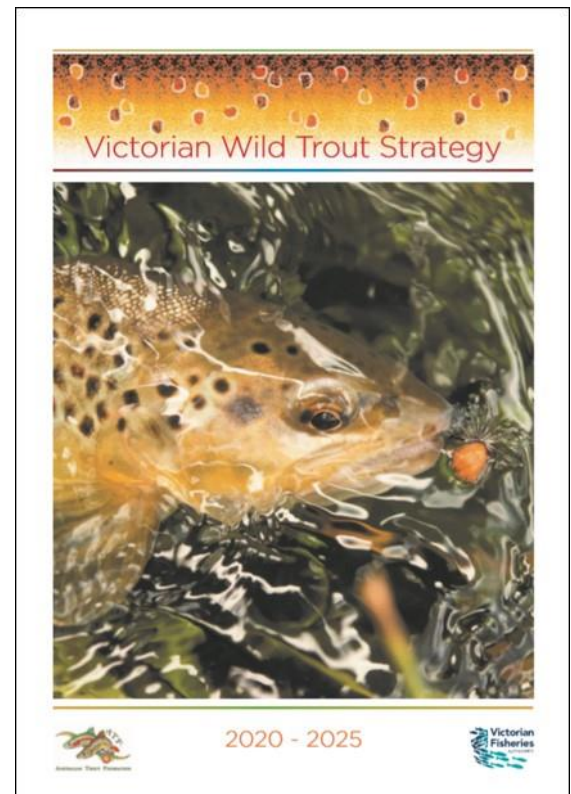
**Assessment statement**

Murray cod represented 3% of catch in four streams of surveyed. Since 2017 Murray cod abundance ranged from low (Lindsay & Mullaroo) to exceptional (Ovens). Electrofishing catch rates have increased in all streams over last three years. The Lindsay & Mullaroo population appears to be recovering from the 2016 blackwater event. A wide range of fish size were observed in most streams, except for the Lindsay & Mullaroo. The percent of fish that were legal size (between 55 & 75 cm) was low (0.4 – 14.3%). Small fish were present in all streams indicating either recent natural recruitment (Ovens) or recent stocking of hatchery-bred fish. Small numbers of mature fish were present in all streams. On this basis Murray cod populations in the four streams surveyed were good and showing signs of improving.




## Wild Trout Fisheries Management Program

- The VFA are pleased to continue the strong partnership with Terry George and the Australian Trout Foundation (ATF) in managing our wild trout fishery.
- The ATF has been instrumental in leading the development of the Victorian Wild Trout Strategy and a new RFL Large Grant for phase 3 of the Wild Trout Fisheries Management Program.
- Phase 3 of the Wild Trout Fisheries Management Program delivers on nine elements the Victorian Wild trout Strategy including;
  - Promotion of responsible trout fishing and handling practices, in the context of climate change – *Care for Trout*.
  - Assessing trout genetics and incorporating wild trout into Snobs Creek to maximise genetic diversity of stocked fish.
  - Collecting seasonal stream temperature data on priority trout rivers and make this information widely available to trout fishers through the ATF website to inform trout fishing options.
- See Terry George for more details.



## Vic Fish Stock

- This year's draft stocking plan for 8 million fish across 13 species has been prepared with assistance from anglers.
- The Vic Fish Stock report is currently with graphic designers and expected to be released and printed in September 2020.



## Inter-Valley Transfers and our precious native fisheries

- 'Inter-Valley Transfers' (IVTs) between the Goulburn and Murray in order to meet irrigation demands have been occurring at unprecedented high levels and reversing seasonal water flows on the Lower Goulburn River.
- Prolonged and unseasonal IVTs over late spring and summer (a period critical to the recruitment success of many native fish species) are jeopardising native fisheries, including threatened populations of native fish, habitat and environmental restoration efforts, along with recreational, socio-economic and cultural values of the Lower Goulburn River
- Due to their impact on these values, IVTs have been subject to review. The review was due to have been completed with new trade and operational rules to be introduced by end of 2020. However, this date has been pushed back to July 2020, with interim rules (up to 50GL/month) and potential risks to the Goulburn River's unique natural and ecosystem values continuing for the upcoming season.
- A Regulatory Impact Statement of the new proposed rules is due to be released in late October/ November 2020 public consultation. The VFA will be engaged in this process.
- In the meantime, the VFA and recreational fishing groups are continuing to advocate that base flows be maintained below 1,000 ML/day to protect native fish populations, fisheries, and indigenous heritage and community values of the river.



## Tarago Reservoir

- A key election commitment made by the Premier of Victoria and listed under Target One Million was to allow recreational boating access at Tarago Reservoir.
- VFA commissioned ARI researchers to conduct a fish population survey of the reservoir in July 2020. Preliminary results suggest a healthy brown trout population exists in the reservoir, including good numbers and sizes of fish over 2kg.
- Partnership discussions are continuing with Melbourne Water regarding allowing recreational boating access.
- The full results of the survey will be presented at the digital Talk Wild Trout Conference.



## Conferences - Talk Wild Trout Conference and Murray Codference

- The Talk Wild Trout Conference and Murray Codference series' over the past five years have been tremendously successful (see our webpages [here](#) and [here](#)).
- COVID-19 has presented new challenges for face-to-face angler engagement given social distancing requirements.
- In August we held a meeting with the Victorian Trout Fisher Reference Group and agreed to hold a digital Talk Wild Trout Conference in Oct-Nov 2020.
- We are now in the early stages of working with the Australian Trout Foundation and trout anglers to plan a program of local and international speakers to showcase the great work underway to understand and improve our wild trout fishery in Victoria, as well as what's occurring in trout fishing and fisheries management around the world. It's sure to be another cracking event that engages anglers right across Victoria and Australia!
- We are considering options with the Murray cod Fisher Reference Group for hosting the Murray Codference in late 2020 or in early 2021.



## Native Fish Hatchery

- The new property has been purchased – 170 ha at Arcadia on the Goulburn River
- Owner's Engineer has been contracted and major onsite works will commence later this year.
- Stage one of the hatchery will now feature 32 ponds, hatchery and quarantine building and, produce around 1.6 million native fish fingerlings (Murray cod and golden perch) each year.
- Construction is planned to commence late 2020 with completion by mid to late 2021 and producing fish by 2022.
- See Anthony Forster for more details.



Stage 2 – VFA's Native Fish Hatchery (Arcadia)

## Maribyrnong River revival project

- The Maribyrnong River Fish Habitat Installation Plan has been completed nominating 8 key sites (from 35) along the Maribyrnong river (between Avondale Heights to Flemington racecourse).
- Habitat is currently being investigated including rock (Department of Justice), natural woody structures, with elements of concrete structures used for in-water stability.
- We are pleased to announce a new project partner with the Department of Defence, who will assist the project by granting special access to land to allow us to store and assemble habitat for deployment into the river. This strategic location will help reduce project cost.
- OzFish Unlimited have delivered the draft historical review report and we are seeking publishing opportunities to help distribute the book widely to all river / environmental enthusiasts.
- 208,000 estuary perch have been stocked so far and a further 100,000 planned next summer.



## Bushfire stocking trial

- In the wake of last summer's devastating bushfires, a meeting was held in June 2020 between VFA, local anglers and representatives from the Australian Trout Foundation, Native Fish Australia, VRFish and the North East CMA to discuss the recovery of river systems and fisheries in north east Victoria.
- Encouragingly some signs of recovery are evident. Meeting attendees agreed baseline fish population surveys and fish stocking trials be conducted to investigate if fish population recovery can be accelerated through stocking of trout and Murray cod.
- The Australian Trout Foundation have long wanted to trial the stocking of wild fish and secured a commitment of trout eggs from NSW Fisheries Gaden Hatchery.
- The eggs were from wild parents as brown trout from Lake Jindabyne run up the Thredbo River to spawn and are trapped at Gaden hatchery's fish trap, where the ripe fish can be stripped. NSW Fisheries donated some eggs for the trial, took tissue samples from the parents (for later genetic identification of the fry) and helped transport the eggs across the border with VFA staff.
- The eggs are currently at Snobs Creek for hatching and will be stocked in the Nariel Creek, with Murray cod to be stocked into Corryong and Cudgewa Creeks. The survey and fish stocking trials will involve anglers and the results will be shared through Talk Wild Trout Conference, Murray Codference and social media.





**If you have any questions or comments about these or other projects, feel free to get in contact with the freshwater fisheries management team:**

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