

# 2018 MURRAY CODFERENCE

## CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Sunday 9th December, Eastbank Conference Centre, Shepparton



## Partners



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## Aboriginal acknowledgement

The Victorian Government proudly acknowledges Victoria's Aboriginal community and their rich culture and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples, and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land on which we work and live.

We recognise the strength of Aboriginal people and communities and value the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal people and communities to Victorian life, through their daily work and at key events, and how this enriches us all.

We recognise all Aboriginal cultures and communities are diverse, and should be celebrated.

We acknowledge that the land and water is of spiritual, cultural and economic importance to Aboriginal people. We embrace the spirit of reconciliation: guaranteeing equality of outcomes and ensuring an equal voice.

We have distinct legislative obligations to Traditional Land Owner groups that are paramount in our responsibilities in managing Victoria's resources.



Ray Ahmat (Yorta Yorta Water Policy Officer) and Neil Morris of the Yorta Yorta Nations 'Woka-Walla Natural Resource Management Program' participating in the FRDC funded 'scientific Murray Cod fishery management project'

## Foreword

Who doesn't love our wonderful native fish. They are unique, spectacular and, as a keen angler, they're a delight to catch.

When I was a young lad growing up in Euroa, I was inspired by my dad's stories of monster cod from yester-year. Back in the 1980's, catching a Murray cod was rare thing and a big deal - huge bragging rights. Fast forward 30 years and it's a very different story. Murray cod are regularly caught by anglers of all skill levels, in dozens of lakes and rivers throughout Victoria. Among these catches we now see, on social media and fishing magazines, big cod well over the magic metre caught on what seems, every imaginable lure. As a bait fisher from way back, even I have been tempted to cast lures. I'm sure my success in this pursuit is just around the corner.

With more than 600 recreational fishers registering to attend this year's event, the Codference is the fast-becoming Australia's premier information exchange and social calendar event of the year for those who chase native fish.

Beyond our iconic Murray cod fisheries the Codference is also about other native fish; Macquarie perch, trout cod, golden perch, silver perch and blackfish. Over the last decade, the Victorian Fisheries Authority with the support of successive State Governments has invested strongly to improve native fisheries. Our focus has been on fish stocking, improving angler access, creating new fisheries, restoring river health and monitoring fish stocks. More broadly, we've reached out and built a strong and respectful relationship with recreational fishers.

While we've made great progress on our bread and butter native fish (Murray cod and golden perch), we've got more work to do on some of our more threatened native fish - Macquarie perch, trout cod, blackfish and catfish. The government's commitment to build a new northern native fish hatchery is a 'game changer' for native fish in Victoria. This will enable us to expand threatened species recovery through stocking and revamp native fish and trout production at Snobs Creek.

I welcome all recreational fishers to the 2018 Murray Codference and we look forward to your feedback and support to take native fisheries in Victoria to the next level.

### Travis Dowling

CEO - Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA)







Photography: Josh Hutchins

# Conference program

9.00 to 9.30 am	Registration & coffee	
9.30 to 9.50 am	Conference launch	Travis Dowling, VFA
9.50 to 10.10 am	Welcome to country	Yorta Yorta traditional owners
10.10 to 10.40 am	<b>KEYNOTE:</b> Bringing home, the USA Pro Bass circuit experience	Carl Jocumsen
10.40 to 11.00 am	Morning tea / coffee	
SESSION 1: Managing native fish (Chair, Graeme Dear, VFA)		
11.00 to 11.20 am	Native fish horizons - Rocklands and beyond	Anthony Forster, VFA
11.20 to 11.40 am	Victoria’s native fish recovery - the last 20 years	Zeb Tonkin & Jarod Lyon, ARI
11.40 to 12.00 pm	‘Back to the Future’ for native fish	Will Trueman
SESSION 2: Fishers feedback (Chair, Tim Curmi, NFA)		
12.00pm to 12.20 pm	Murray cod stocking in Victoria - early history	Bill Classon
12.20 to 12.40 pm	Access all areas	Michael Burgess, VRFish
12.40 to 1.00 pm	Kids and fishing - the perfect combination!	Robbie Alexander
1.00 to 1.20 pm	Questions to panel - what’s on your mind	All
1.20 to 2.10 pm	Lunch (Foyer displays)	
SESSION 3: Better fishing (Chair, John Cahill)		
2.10 to 2.30 pm	The adventures of a cod girl	Karen Rees
2.30 to 2.50 pm	Big cod casting tactics	Lubin Pfeiffer
2.50 to 3.10 pm	Golden perch tournament tactics	Stephen Booth
SESSION 4: Open session (Chair, Travis Dowling)		
3.10 to 3.40 pm	Questions & answers - what's on your mind	All
3.40 to 4.00 pm	Fishers are constantly learning	Graeme Dear
4.00 to 4.10 pm	Wrap up & acknowledgements	Travis Dowling, VFA



# Bringing home, the USA Pro Bass circuit experience

## Carl Jocumsen

Carl Jocumsen is Australia's only full time bass fishing pro competing in the USA, and Australia's first and only angler to qualify to fish on invitational Bassmaster 'Elite' tour.

As a youngster, Carl's local waterways near Toowoomba nurtured his interest and passion for our freshwater native fish - especially Murray cod - and his formative fishing years were spent in the of south east Queensland region catching golden perch, bass, and of course Murray cod.

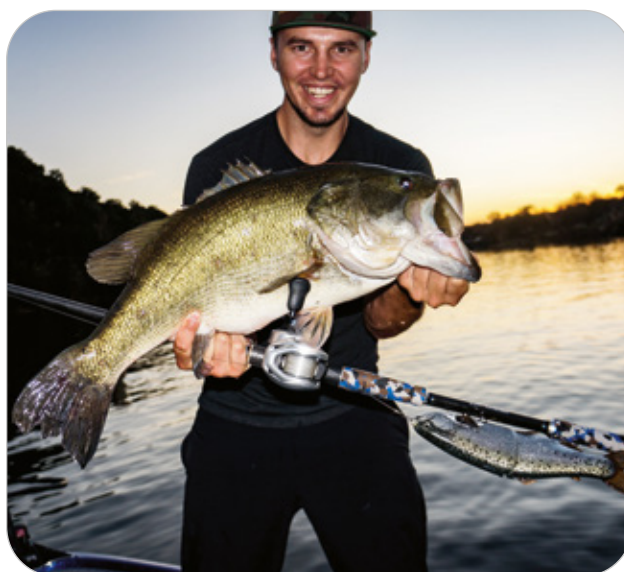
Carl's journey as a competitive angler began on the ABT Bass circuit where he honed his skills for 11 years and climbed his way to the top. His first taste of the US bass fishing tournament scene came after winning a trip to fish in California where with no experience at all on American bass, he nearly won the co-angler section! When only in his mid-20's, Carl went 'all-in' to try to live his dream and moved to the USA to become a professional bass angler.

Nearly 10 years later, Carl is well known across the USA bass fishing fraternity, has a massive social media following and is once again rising through the ranks of the best anglers in the country.

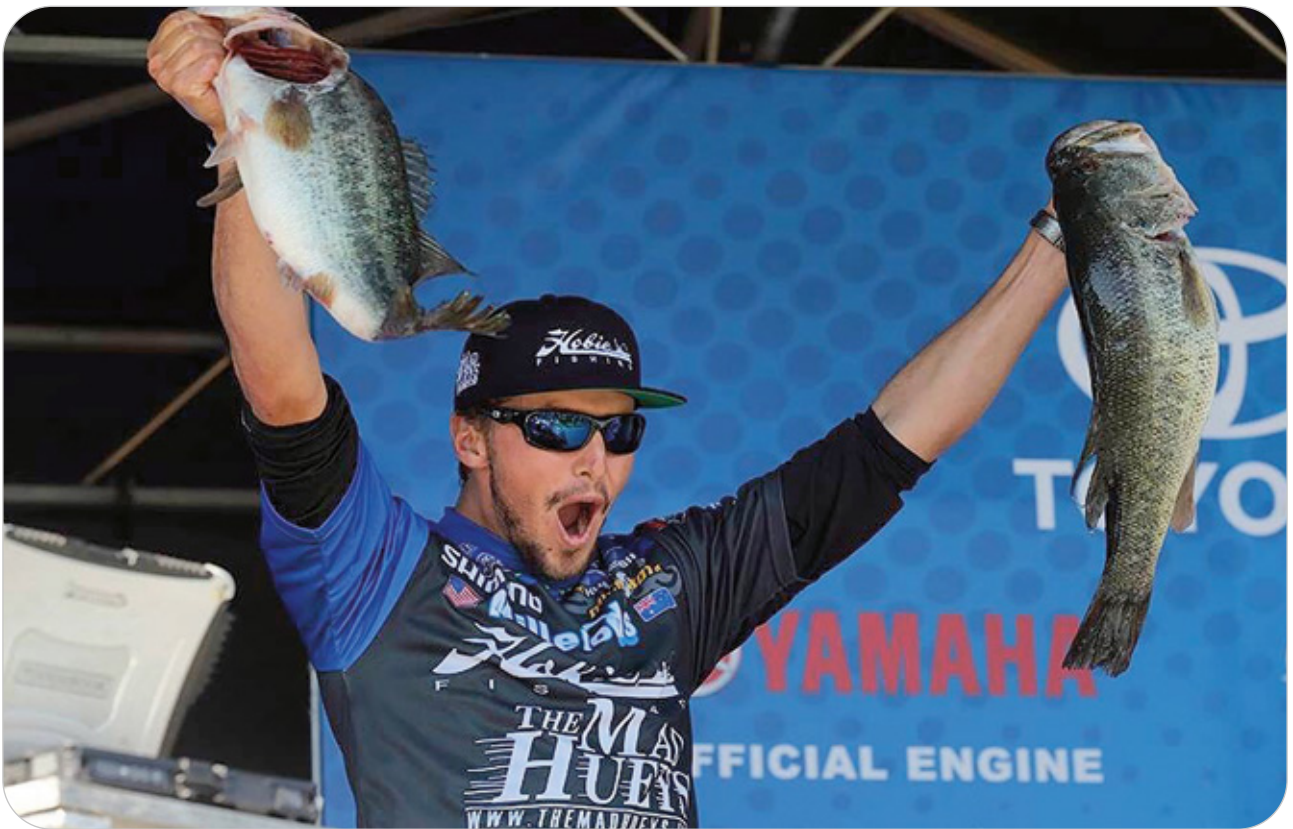
Carl still loves his Murray cod fishing and on his rare trips back home always finds time to chase them. These days he enjoys applying the swimbait knowledge and skills learned on largemouth bass to effectively lure the might Murray cod!

In fact, he attributes Murray cod angling as a major contributor to his success in America because of the behavioural similarities shared between these two iconic species.

In this presentation, Carl will explain his swimbait techniques and how to apply them when chasing the largest cod possible.







# Native fish horizons - Rocklands and beyond

## Anthony Forster

Manager Inland Fisheries, Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA)

Throughout the last two decades or so, our most popular native fish have been making a comeback - and it hasn't happened by accident. By working with recreational fishers, water and land managers, and researchers, we've boosted stocking, repaired fish habitat, removed barriers to fish movement, improved angling access and been tracking the performance of our native fisheries like never before. This is creating quality native fishing. Here's an insight into how we got here, and our thoughts on how to make fishing even better.

### Taking fish stocking to the next level

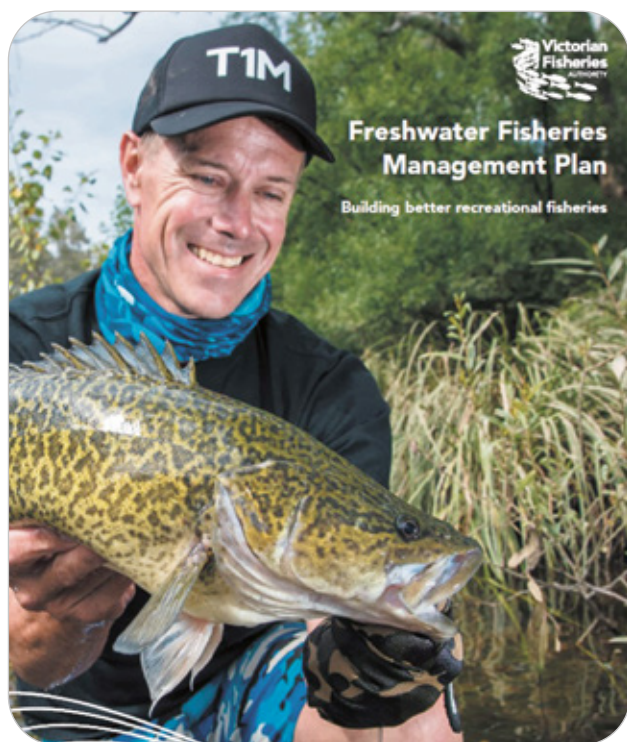
In Victoria over the last 20 years, we've stocked the freshwater waterways with around 35 million native fish, including 19 million golden perch, 11

million Murray cod, 1.5 million Australian bass, 760,000 silver perch, 560,000 estuary perch, 356,000 trout cod, 185,000 Macquarie perch, 7,000 Barramundi and 2,500 freshwater catfish. Over this period, the number of waters being stocked has almost doubled. We've discovered how to get better returns from 'pulse stocking', particularly in large impoundments, as highlighted by the 3-year Murray Cod Million Lake Eildon, which has created exciting year-round quality fishery.

In the last decade, we've resurrected the stocking of bass in Gippsland and, started an Australian first large-scale breeding and stocking of estuary perch in a dozen waterways. We've restarted Macquarie perch breeding. Our decade of trout cod stocking was highly successful in the Ovens River and, we recently opened-up trout cod fisheries near Beechworth. We've also worked with the private sector to breed freshwater catfish.

In addition, last year we commenced the building of a brand new native fishery at Rocklands Reservoir, south of Horsham. Rocklands is the second-largest freshwater impoundment in Victoria: with a surface area of 67 km<sup>2</sup>, it's a 4-hour drive from Melbourne and has a dozen camping areas with facilities, and other dispersed camping sites along its shore. It is a shallow reservoir, with an abundance of upright and fallen timber dating back to when the forest was flooded during construction in 1953. In 2017, we stocked 205,000 golden perch and 215,000 Murray cod into Rocklands, and we plan to continue this stocking momentum for at least the next 5 years.

Every year, we stock catchable rainbow trout into 60+ family-friendly lakes just prior to the second- and third-term school holidays. This







creates opportunity for families and children to catch fish close to where they live. We are expanding this program to include the stocking of silver and golden perch, which will provide better summer fishing opportunities.

### **Repairing where fish live**

When we survey anglers, ‘repairing where fish live’ is always their highest investment priority, so we’ve taken a partnership approach with other agencies and recreational fishing licence holders to restore fish habitat. Here are a few examples of this:

- In the last 3 years, Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) have constructed more than 2,300 km of fencing to protect riparian (stream-side) land and river health.
- Over the last decade, with federal government funding, we have constructed 15 fishways, which opened around 2,300 km of the Murray River to fish passage.
- As part of the Ovens River Demonstration Reach, we installed 305 snags and 25 ‘fish hotels’, removed 18 km of willows, and built a new fishway. These works realised a 450% increase in Murray cod abundance.

CMAs throughout Victoria are working with recreational fishers, more than ever before, through the establishment of the \$1 million Angler Riparian Partnerships Program.

- Over the last 2 years, the Goulburn Broken CMA has facilitated 13 Angler Riparian Partnership projects, involving 250 anglers and 16 angling groups. More than 2,500 trees were planted, and 2 km of riparian fencing was erected to keep livestock away from streams.

### **Freshwater Fisheries Management Plan**

At a more strategic level, the VFA recently published the Freshwater Fisheries Management Plan - a 10-year plan to build better recreational fisheries.



The Plan will drive investment partnerships between fish, land and water managers, because the performance of our fisheries is determined by what happens on land, not just in the water. We need all agencies on board to improve our fisheries. The Plan lays out 20 investment priorities, and we are soon to set up an implementation group to translate these priorities into on-ground actions. Copies of the Plan are in each Murray Codference backpack.

For the first time, we are routinely monitoring the abundance, size and year class of native fish populations at 100 sites, across 11 rivers in 10 catchments. This Native Fish Report Card Program is jointly funded by VFA, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and recreational fishing licence fees. We are also developing a GoFishVic mobile App to collect fishing catch-and-effort information at our key recreational fishery waterways.

### **The case for a new native fish hatchery**

In developing the Freshwater Fisheries Management Plan, we identified to need to build a new warm-water native fish hatchery in northern Victoria. This will be essential for continuing and

expanding our stocking effort, because Snobs Creek Hatchery is at full capacity, and private hatcheries in New South Wales are increasing their market focus on exporting live Murray cod fingerlings to China and on supplying domestic Murray cod grow-out farmers. A new hatchery will improve our production efficiency for warm-water native fish, enable the production of more Murray cod, golden perch and freshwater catfish, and free up our capacity to breed more trout cod and Macquarie perch at Snobs Creek.

### **More work to do**

Although we have made great strides in rebuilding native fisheries, we still have a long way to go. We've made good progress with trout cod in the Murray (below Yarrawonga), in the Ovens River, and in the Goulburn River below Nagambie, but we need to expand our breeding and stocking program in order to create new populations. Even more pressing is the need to invest in the improvement of Macquarie perch captive breeding.

Our bold vision for these species over the next decade is the developing and opening of trout cod and Macquarie perch recreational





fisheries in key waters [including the Ovens, Goulburn (Trawool to Lake Nagambie), Seven Creeks, and other waterways] where we can show they either have established self-sustaining populations or can support viable recreational fisheries through stocking.

We are also keen to develop agreements with organisations like VicRoads and VicForests to acquire snags for fish, including transportation at a reduced cost to priority restoration sites within CMAs.

There are still an estimated 10,000 barriers throughout the Murray-Darling Basin, preventing native fish movement. Reconnecting these waters is critical for the breeding cycles of many native fish.

### **We need anglers' help**

It's an exciting time to be targeting native fish in Victoria. The legwork we've put in over the last 20-odd years is paying off, but there's more to be done. Our waterways have been highly modified over the last 150 years, so it's a long road back to the restoration of native fish populations. Work is needed to assist

those threatened native fish that aren't doing so well. The Freshwater Fisheries Management Plan lays out a blueprint for accelerating the recovery effort through partnerships.

Anglers' attitudes to native fish are changing, and there is a strong and growing catch-and-release ethos that is being reinforced by anglers who manage social media groups. In addition, the Murray cod slot limit regulations have been very well received.

Rather than the traditional 'close the fishery and lock them away' approach, we want anglers actively involved in recovering native fish populations - catching them, releasing them, tracking their abundance, and supporting fish habitat works and fish stocking. We aspire to bringing back threatened native fish, creating self-sustaining populations that can support recreational fishing. Placing a recreational, social and economic value on threatened native fish is a positive way to secure the resources and motivation needed to rebuild native fish populations.



# Victoria's native fish recovery - the last 20 years

**Zeb Tonkin & Jarod Lyon**

Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research

Many anglers are declaring that Murray cod and golden perch fishing is the best it has been for years. The number of magazine articles and social media posts that feature pictures of native fish with smiling anglers would seem to support the claims - and so would the number of boats seen at popular lakes and river access points. Recreational native fishing is on the rise.

It has not always been like this. Older anglers who caught cod and golden perch in their youth, or heard their older relations telling fishing stories of mighty Murray cod, rued the decline they witnessed. And those who grew up in the 1970s thought cod were a bit of a unicorn - a myth of the rivers. Science supported these concerns, and surveys showed that native fish populations in the Murray-Darling Basin had markedly declined, with many once common species becoming conservation issues.

So, have populations of Murray cod and golden perch made a big comeback over the last 20 years? The Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research has been carrying out fish surveys for many years across the state, and the data collected shows an upward trend for native fish populations in many areas. Some increases have been large. The science is backing up what anglers are seeing - that there are more native fish about now than in the recent past. The fish survey data is showing that good things are happening in Victoria and that native fish are starting to reassert their presence in areas where they have not been seen for many years.

The native fish comeback has been made possible by the dramatic increase in our knowledge of native fish and their requirements over the last four decades. Such knowledge has been gained through, for example, ecological studies on the





habitat requirements and movement of Murray cod and golden perch through the 1990s, and initiatives like the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's Native Fish Strategy in the 2000s (which supported basin-wide native fish research and increased public awareness and support of the native fish plight). This has led to the implementation of actions aimed at mitigating threatening processes and rebuilding populations.

Such actions include fisheries management decisions, such as commercial fishing bans, size and bag limits, and closed seasons. In addition, they include increased management of environmental water flows to work in with native fish cycles, the development and refinement of native fish breeding techniques and facilities, improved strategies for restocking and relocation, resnagging for fish habitat creation, installation of fish ladders to facilitate migration, and improved land

management and revegetation along streams and in the catchment. Furthermore, increased public awareness of native fish has led to an increasing body of anglers practising catch-and-release.

The impact of all these previous and current actions is now being seen in improved native fish populations.

There is still much to be done, but the declining trajectories of Murray cod and golden perch have been turned upwards, and the future of native fish is now looking a lot brighter.

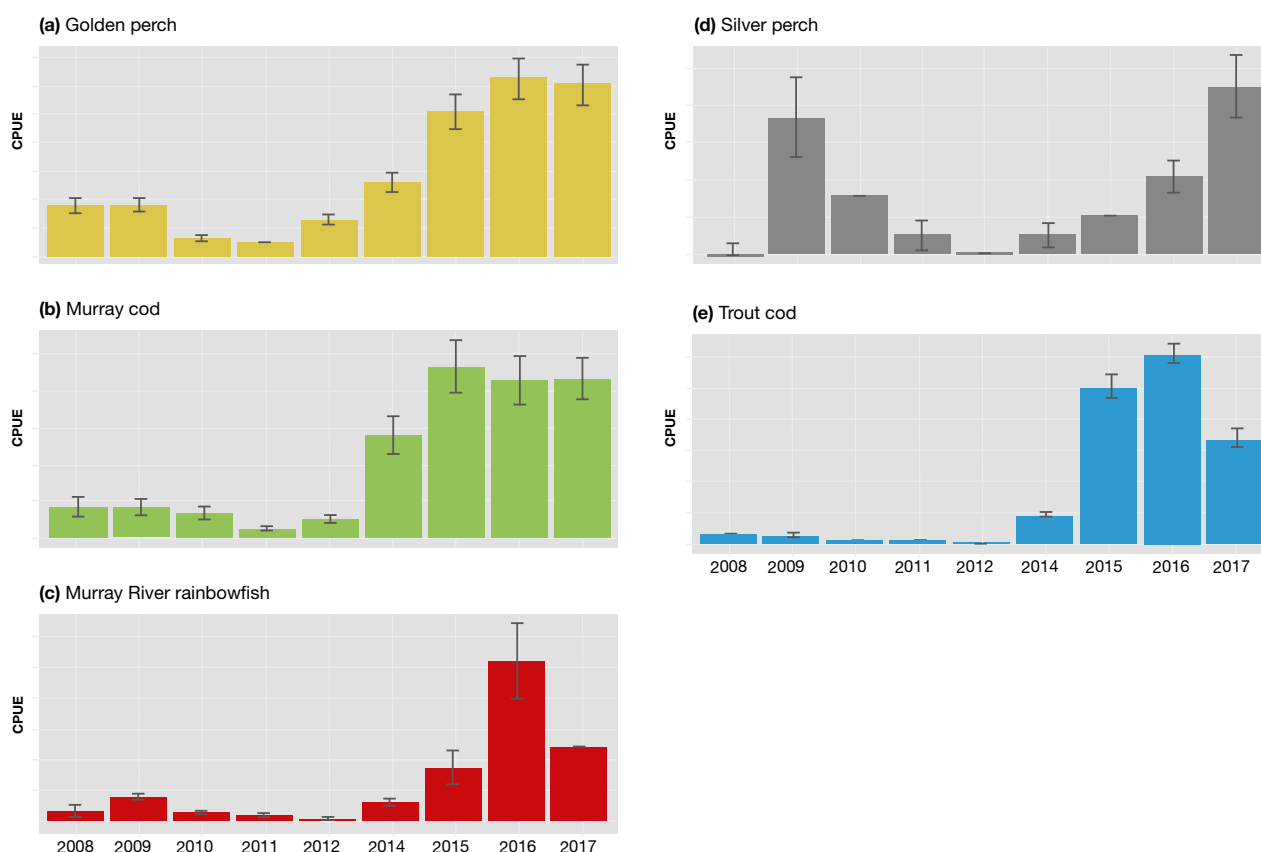


Figure 36L Annual trends in catch per unit effort (CPUE; Mean number of fish per 1000 EF seconds<sup>-1</sup> ± SE) for (a) Golden perch; (b) Murray cod; (c) Murray River rainbowfish and; (d) Silver perch; and (e) Trout cod, recorded from electrofishing surveys in Reach 4 of the Goulburn River from 2008-2017.

# ‘Back to the Future’ for native fish

**Will Trueman**

When I was a kid, most of my freshwater fish captures were of trout and redfin. Native fish were generally scarce, and the capture of a single cod sometimes made the front page of newspapers. The recollections of my dad and uncle were very different. They told stories of giant Murray cod in the Goulburn, big river blackfish near Werribee, and rivers crowded with Macquarie perch and the fabled trout cod. In my youth, there were few locations where I could experience the fishing of the past.

Fast-forward to the 21st century, and Victoria has some outstanding fisheries for Murray cod and golden perch. We have developing fisheries for Australian bass and estuary perch too. For these four species, the fishing is currently the best I’ve seen in my lifetime. There are, however, some forgotten native fish that were once important to anglers in this state. They have been forgotten by anglers because they are not commonly encountered, are not targeted with modern angling techniques, or are endangered and protected. These native fish species could have potential for hitherto unrealised fisheries.

Trout cod are a hard-fighting sportfish that can be taken by fly, lure or bait. They almost became extinct in this state, with their last stronghold

being the Seven Creeks. After a 40-year recovery effort, they are now common in several rivers. Due to their smaller size, they are sometimes considered to be a nuisance by anglers targeting large Murray cod. Trout cod could, however, be an outstanding stocking option in streams too small to sustain a large cod fishery, or in rivers at higher altitudes that are marginal for trout.

Macquarie perch were once the most important native angling species after cod, but they are now restricted to a handful of waters. They are perhaps this nation’s best freshwater table fish, and they are excellent fighters on light tackle. New fisheries could be established in the types of waters as described for trout cod. Unlike golden perch, they have the potential to spawn in streams feeding impoundments like Eildon.

Freshwater catfish are an excellent table fish and are capable of a strong tussle. Unlike most native fish, they can reproduce in dams. They could be a potential species for fisheries in billabongs, where there are currently few angling options, and they offer another option for anglers using bait. Silver perch are easily caught on bait and will take flies too. They are currently being used to stock nominated ‘Family Fishing Lakes’, and an expansion of these stockings could introduce many more young people to the sport of angling.

South of the Great Dividing Range, the river blackfish was once caught in large numbers at up to 4 kg in weight. What few anglers realise is that they can be easily caught on lures and flies. Captured this way, they fight much better than on bait. There is the potential here for a revolution in angling techniques for this species, along the



Sevens Creek Macquarie perch (J.Kearns)



Trout cod and Macquarie perch were once important recreational angling species, particularly in the rivers and large streams of the foothill areas upstream of the Hume Freeway. They have the potential to provide excellent angling by plugging a gap in areas less suited to Murray cod and introduced trout (image courtesy of the late Russell Stillman).

lines we have seen for Murray cod. Like catfish, they can breed in dams. Unfortunately, blackfish have undergone a major decline, exacerbated by the recent Millennium Drought and by bushfires, and they now provide limited angling.

The Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) is developing major initiatives to restore the populations of the native fish species I have described, and to develop recreational fisheries for them. I am delighted to hear of VFA's commitment to:

*“Develop and open up trout cod and Macquarie perch recreational fisheries in key waters, including the Ovens River, Goulburn River (Trawool to Lake Nagambie) and the Seven Creeks (Polly*

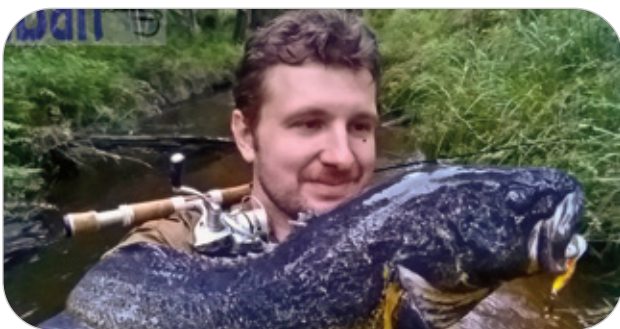
*McQuinn's Weir), and other waterways where we can show they either have established self-sustaining populations or can support viable recreational fisheries through stocking.”*

These waters are just some initial targets, and it is envisaged that up to 20 fisheries might be created for these two species. Similarly, there are plans for restoring populations of catfish, silver perch and river blackfish, and for developing fisheries for them.

A major impediment to these goals is a lack of capacity of the Snobs Creek Hatchery, which is at its limit just meeting production targets for trout and Murray cod. Since the 1970s, there have been proposals to build a native fish hatchery near Shepparton, and recently the Victorian Labor State Government announced its intention to fund the construction of this facility.

As anglers, if we dream of winding back the clock and once again having the quality of angling of the past, four things need to happen: the hatchery near Shepparton has to be built, government agencies must coordinate their efforts, anglers need to be acknowledged as important stakeholders in conservation projects, and the recreational angling community needs to support these initiatives.

If we get these things right, it might be ‘Back to the Future’ for native fish.



River blackfish south of the Great Dividing Range can grow to a large size, such as this 70 cm specimen. What most anglers don't realise is that they can be readily caught on lures and flies. They could provide outstanding fisheries in some areas, in dams as well as in streams. As has happened with cod, a revolution in angling technique is needed. Rebuilding river blackfish populations will provide a great angling option for southern Victoria (image courtesy of Peter Pomorski).



# Murray cod stocking in Victoria

## - early history

### Bill Classon

Stocking has been, and continues to be, an important tool for creating native fish fisheries. Many of us today who enjoy our cod fishing in the large lakes and impoundments take Murray cod stocking for granted. But Murray cod stocking has a relatively recent history - and there were a lot of hurdles to jump over to get to where we are today. I've been very fortunate to be somewhat involved in this from inception.

In Victoria, Murray cod were first stocked out of the harvest from the Warmwater Fisheries Station Pilot Project at Lake Charlegrark in our far west, starting in 1976 and continuing until 1984, when cod breeding research and development moved to Snobs Creek Hatchery. Cod were rare in the 1970s, and cod fishing had dramatically declined. Research to develop the techniques for captive breeding of the fish for stocking was undertaken, for both conservation and recreational purposes. Snobs Creek Hatchery and the Narrandera Fisheries Centre (Inland Fisheries Research Station) were pioneers in this wonderful breeding work - which continues today.

There were successes and failures with cod breeding, but over time the techniques were modified, and the facilities upgraded and redeveloped. In the last decade, Murray cod production (in terms of both numbers and consistency) has vastly improved, which means we have more cod for stocking.

Increased resources and a larger supply of fingerling cod have meant that stocking can now be expanded to include many locations, and the number of cod stocked into each waterbody can be increased.

Although various strategies have been tried, the stocking of large numbers of cod ('pulse stocking') into locations has been demonstrated to be the most successful method. Lake Eildon is probably our best example.

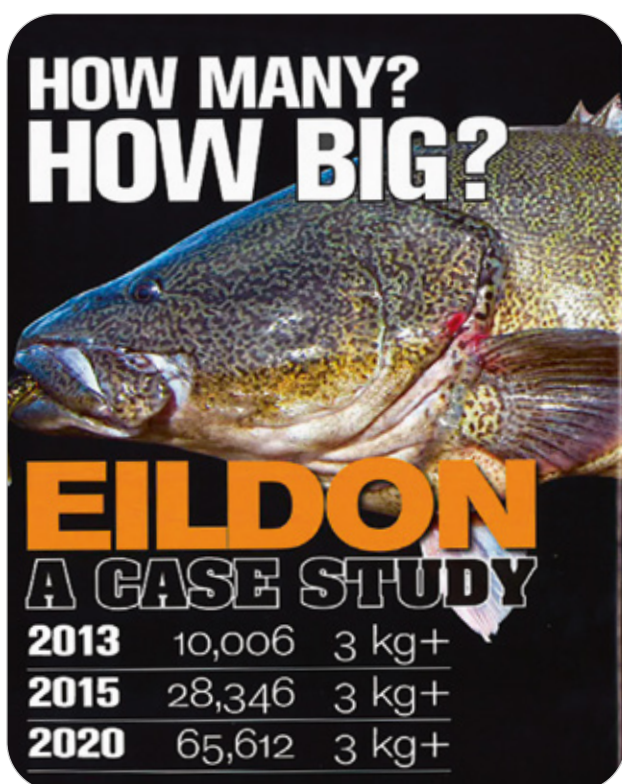
Lake Eildon is a huge waterbody (130 km<sup>2</sup>), and the availability of large numbers of cod from the breeding programs led to the 'Murray Cod Million Lake Eildon' project, which saw over a million Murray cod stocked into the lake in 2010, 2011 and 2012.

These large committed stockings have prompted me to calculate that there will be more than 10,000 Murray cod over 10 kilos by 2020, and 25,000 Murray cod over 10 kilos by 2025! All the better for anglers.

The hard work and eventual success in breeding native fish like cod, and the subsequent stocking of large numbers of fingerlings, has brought us to the point where cod fishing in Eildon, and in other impoundments, is now enjoyed by many anglers.

And the fish and fisheries are continuing to grow.

Victorian investment in and commitment to building recreational fishing is the envy of recreational fishers throughout Australia.





# Access all areas

## Mike Burgess

VRFish

Victoria's native freshwater fishery is undergoing a renaissance. The current quality of fishing, especially fishing for our iconic Murray cod, has created excitement across regional Victoria.

Fish stocking rates are now at the highest on record, with 5 million native fish stocked in 2017-2018. Habitat restoration works are occurring at an unprecedented rate, and smart use of environmental water is supporting native fish migrations and spawning events.

Improved fisheries and catchment management and interventions are underpinning the continuing

success of our fishery. However, this investment and the potential social benefits are at risk unless we protect and improve recreational fisher access to the fishery and maintain the style of fishing experience our fishers are seeking.

Although fishing is the focal activity on a fishing trip, recreational fishers claim they are seeking an experience that enables them to connect with nature, relax, spend time with family and friends - and hopefully catch some fish! Based on these motivations, freshwater fishers are attracted to healthy, scenic and forested locations, which



Ross Trely with a nice Murray cod from a VFA angler tagging project on the Goulburn River. Participating in citizen science demonstrates to the wider community our stewardship of fish and of the ecosystems that support our fish.



are invariably National or Regional Parks, or places 'off the beaten track'. In many cases, the particular area visited holds a strong attraction for an individual, for generations of a family, and/or for the local community. Fishing trips are commonly associated with some form of camping.

Our rights to camp and to access our fishery are at risk from planning processes that seek to apply 'best practice' principles to management strategies. There is a trend among land managers to consolidate camping areas, restrict the number of camping sites, introduce booking systems to manage peak demands, and move the sites further away from the water's edge. The right to have a campfire is continually under threat, despite strong advocacy by VRFish.

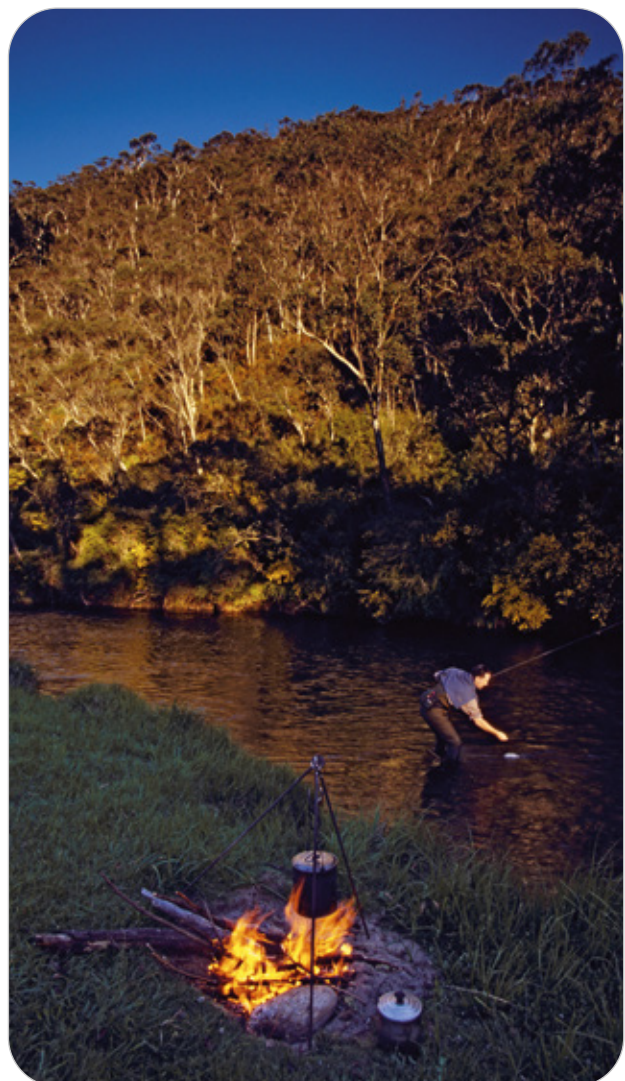
In addition, there is much confusion around landholder and recreational user obligations on licensed Crown Land Water Frontages, which take the form of a narrow strip of land adjoining a river for which an adjoining landowner has obtained a licence for grazing or management purposes. This confusion leads to unjust barriers to access and unnecessary conflict. Legislative reforms are required if the law is to keep in step with our need to optimise access to our burgeoning native freshwater fishery and popular trout fishery.

Opening up new areas for camping is critical, including on Crown Land. There also are tremendous opportunities for private landholders to support recreational fishers by offering new camping opportunities and better access to our waterways. Innovative approaches and initiatives should be embraced. For example, Youcamp is an online portal that enables private landholders to offer their property for camping, while protecting their guests with insurance cover. Unfortunately, local council rules and regulations make it almost impossible for Victorians to open up new private land fishing spots.

Boat launching sites that are classed as 'informal' by land managers can have high significance for fishers, but such sites are not always maintained and (worse) can be at risk of closure through



Camping goes hand-in-hand with a fishing experience in Victoria. Protecting our camping rights also protects our access to the fishery.



The majority of Victorian fishers want to relax in nature while on a fishing trip, including enjoying a campfire to cook up a meal and keep warm.



Brooks Lane boat ramp at Pental Island was upgraded by the Donald Angling Club through a \$37,000 grant from the State Government's plan for better access for recreational fishers.

consolidation. There have also been cases where access roads to fishing sites or boat ramps have been closed by private landholders.

Vastly improved consultation with recreational fishers is critical for communicating the social needs of fishers to land managers. Issues around access tracks, paths, boat ramps and specific campsites are likely to be best dealt with at a local level and in partnership with other bush user groups. Given the level of community angst with land managers that is present in some areas, a co-design approach may offer a more effective way to balance fisher needs and community expectations with the requirements of conservation and cultural heritage.

When it comes to both securing better access and protecting what we have, recreational fishers also have to 'walk the walk'. The risk of being tainted by the undesirable actions of one or two individual fishers or some non-fishers is high. There is a need to deter undesirable behaviour and misuse of riparian areas, including those

located in Crown water frontages and National Parks. Litter, illegal fishing, uncontrolled campfires, illegal firewood collection, vehicle use, and on-water speed and safety are some of the issues that need funded awareness campaigns and peer-to-peer education if we are to support appropriate attitudes and behaviours.

It's opportune to ask recreational fishers what stewardship role they want to play in protecting and maintaining our access. Fishers may need to go over and above by participating in peer-to-peer education, reporting illegal activity, and actively supporting land managers in the management of key areas.

Likewise, our sector must continue to demonstrate to the whole community that recreational fishers have a strong sense of stewardship of their native fish and of the ecosystems that support these fish. Fishers participating in fish habitat restoration and citizen science are demonstrating this stewardship, and campaigns such as Care







# Kids and fishing - the perfect combination!

**Robbie Alexander**

G'day everyone, and G'day kids! I am SUPER excited to be able to make my presentation at the 2018 Murray Codference today, and guess what? It's all about kids.

I will be speaking to the kids in the audience, and also speaking about the kids and why getting kids involved in fishing is so important to me.

I want to speak about the importance of making the right decisions at a time in life when kids are most vulnerable, and how a passion for fishing can really help you make those decisions correctly.

I want to share with you a story of a close friend of mine that I used to fish with when I was a kid.

I will be leaving the technical stuff to the smart people, as I present a light-hearted display

including a slideshow, a PowerPoint presentation, some video footage and a few photos.

Something that I have never really spoken about a lot is my motivation. Who are my heroes? Who motivates me? Who do I look up to? You will likely be very surprised as I feature a video made by one of my greatest motivators. (Hint: it's a young kid!)

At break time, it will be a race to the sandwiches and donuts. After you have something to eat, make sure you come and ask me for a selfie. I love to pose for photos with kids and chat about fishing. Ask me as many fishing questions as you like. Come and introduce yourself.

The 2018 Murray Codference is going to be a bonza event that I am so proud to be a part of, and I can't wait to meet as many kids as possible.



This is one of my all-time favourite photos of kids fishing. Will O'Connor and Hugh Blythe with a Murray cod surface lure double hook-up.



Jed Nagel came to Wangaratta from South Australia just to go Murray cod fishing in 2016, and has been nagging his parents to move here ever since.



Tom Rochow outfished his school teacher (Mr Marshall) and me this day, catching a nice little Murray cod on a spinnerbait that he made.



Due to their willingness to take most baits or lures, trout cod are easy to catch and a fantastic fish for introducing kids to fishing.



Liam Wolstenholme is king! This was easily one of the most memorable fishing evenings of my life. Liam and his sister Zoe managed to catch around 9 or 10 small Murray cod and trout cod, just bait fishing off the North Beaches sand bar in Wangaratta. Catching cod in the Ovens River is so easy these days ... just ask Liam!



There's me with my daughter Holly catching redfin. Many kids start out fishing for redfin and carp, and as they grow older they tend to 'graduate' to Murray cod in the search for more sporting fish.



# The adventures of a cod girl

**Karen Rees**

Murray cod fishing ... an obsession that unites men and women, and the young to the young at heart. The mighty Murray Cod ignites something inside our hearts.

My passion for Murray Cod fishing is something I had never envisioned for myself. It was a hot, balmy summer's evening back in 2014. My sunglasses had just gone overboard. I was disheartened. I just wanted to go home ... but for some reason I pressed on. That night entirely changed my perspective of fishing. It was the night my passion was truly ignited, the night that has determined so much of my life and where I am today. That was the night the mighty Murray cod exploded on my Jackall Pompadour. A night I'll never forget!

Murray Cod fishing has taken me near and far, from having success in fishing competitions to now being selected as a leader for the Women in Recreational Fishing Network. It has been an adventure of self-discovery, an adventure shared with those I love, and now an adventure into the future ... an adventure that I hope will inspire others and the generations to come.

This is my adventure...  
The Adventures of a Cod Girl.









# Big cod casting tactics

Lubin Pfeiffer

It's often said that big cod are the fish of a thousand casts. Anyone that has fished regularly for these fish would totally agree. I can attest that every one of the really big cod I have caught have meant lots of effort with the rod and lure. While both technique and lure choice play a huge part in success, there is one thing that cod fishos are always looking for - that silver bullet for their next large cod capture. I've spent countless hours, days and years trying to work out what that secret key is to getting big cod to bite on a regular basis.

While there are small components, one-percenters that can add up to a successful recipe, I've come to the conclusion - for the fish caught in my boat anyway - that confidence and how you use your time out on the water, are what will land your next giant cod out of any given water body. In this talk, I'll run through some of the ways to best manage your time out casting for big cod, so that your lure is swimming more often and in the right locations, as I believe this is one of the most important factors to getting those big bites on a regular basis.





## Confidence

Confidence in fishing for large cod is one very interesting thing to think about, and it comes from a few factors - lures and location being the biggest two. Big cod are caught on so many different lures and techniques these days. Our Aussie market has simply been flooded with all sorts of awesome creations. I've always loved the fact that us cod fishos are dreamers, always coming up with the next theory as to why this lure is going to be the key. We can't see the fish we are casting at most of the time, so we are just imagining what the fish is doing, where it is sitting and how it is going to react to our offering. This, however, is actually a good thing, because it allows us to keep an open mind. I like to believe that in places like the Murray River, where I fish a lot of the time, there is at least one big cod sitting in each of the good places I'm casting at. The fact that I can't see them refusing the lure means that I can keep confidence in my lure, casting it at the next likely spot. I will do this until I find the right fish and the lure gets eaten by the big one I was after. If I kept seeing fish refusing my offering, I'd spend more time changing lures than casting! Most cod lures do similar things. They either wobble or swim or spin to make a commotion in the water and let the cod know they are there. I find the best lure to tie on is the one that you are most confident is going to work. Seems simple, right? But the fact is, if you are fishing a lure and don't believe it is

going to get eaten, it most likely won't. My choice might change throughout the day's fishing and from season to season, but I need to be sending those good vibes down the line. Every time that lure appears near the boat, I want to be saying, "Damn, that looks good. It's going to be eaten for sure!"

## Learning your water

Location is a very interesting one when it comes to big cod. I'm sure every cod angler has done it - I know I have heaps of times - staring at the background of someone's big cod photo and trying to work out exactly where they caught that fish. You need to know exactly the snag and the bank they were fishing, because this will then mean you can go there and catch one just like it, right? It actually most likely doesn't. All of my cod fishing is done within the Murray-Darling basin, which has over 70,000 kms of river within its river valley. That equates to a lifetime's worth of likely spots in which you are able to cast. A particular location or snag is irrelevant. What is important is having clean fishable water and learning the area you are regularly fishing well. This is where places like Lake Eildon are fantastic, because the water is always clear and you can take that component out of the equation. If the water is clear on the piece of river I am fishing, irrespective of whether it is in South Australia, Victoria or New South Wales, I should be able to get a big cod out of it if I put in the effort.





This is where the time factor comes up again. Learning your piece of water will help you make the best use of your time out on the water. I only fish in daylight hours these days, so from sun-up till sunset I want my lure to be swimming in good locations all day long. This means I need to learn where all the best-looking banks are with the best-looking snags. That way I can have my lure swimming in the best big cod water all day without wasting any time. Don't get me wrong - I absolutely love exploring new water, but how often when you are doing this do you come across somewhere where it's a bit too shallow, or not what you thought it was going to be. On the water that I regularly fish, I can tell you which side of the snag to cast, spots where I'll get snagged, and which way to position the boat to get the lure in the best spot and yet be able to make a move to the next best run of timber without wasting a single minute on the water. I know what lures will be at the right depth for the water I plan to fish, and can have them tied on even before I make that first cast in the morning.

### **Time management**

I often tell people that it takes one cast to catch the fish of your lifetime. Just one! So when you are out on the water, you need to make the absolute most out of every minute you are there. Treat it like a job. The job description is to cast your favourite lure (in the colour you like the most!) at the best-looking snags all day. Getting the rhythm is a phrase I use often while out on the water, and finding the rhythm will make the best use of your time. Big cod anglers that regularly grind the whole day away will know exactly what I mean. When things are going smoothly and the rhythm is good, the big bite comes along. With big cod in my experience, the bite will usually come within the first five casts at a particular area, whether it be at a snag, log or weedbed. I always put around 10-15 casts at an area to be sure, but I know if it's going to happen it will happen early. The more good water you can cover, the better your chances are of finding that fish that is ready to go.

## Getting the rhythm

This can be achieved more easily by having two rods rigged and a different style of lure on each rod - say, a sinking lure on one rod, and a floating crankbait or topwater lure on the other. This means you can efficiently move through the best areas. Using this method, you are getting a lure where it should be every time, covering water and not getting snagged too often. If you use lures that stray on the cast or get hung up a lot, you may take up to 50 casts out of your day's fishing. When we are talking big cod, and the fact that you only realistically want one bite, taking away 50 casts is massive. Really large cod lures might get more interest over a smaller model, but if you can't cast them effectively they are a waste of time. The system you will feel most confidence in is one that will work perfectly and land the lure in the zone, cast after cast. You need to know your water well so you can start the day in the best water, and stay in the best water until it gets dark. This may include prime-looking logs, rocks or weedbeds. When we are fishing a stretch of prime cod water, I like to know exactly where I'm headed next. That way I can simply lift the electric and motor to there and start fishing again. When these factors come together, the rhythm is smooth, and the big bites won't be far away.

## Never give up

Big cod anglers never give up. Yes, it's almost a mental disorder, but I can cast all day long on the water for no bites, only to go back to camp and get up the next morning and do it all over again - until the lure gets crunched. Sure, we have good days when multiple large cod are landed, but I also have lots of days when I don't even get a touch. One thing for sure is that you won't catch a cod sitting at home looking at pictures and dreaming about it! The best cod anglers in Australia are the ones that are out there all the time casting, and they never stop until the boat is back on the trailer because they have to go home. I've had massive fish bites the first cast of the day, in the middle of the day and also in the 'death knock' hour in the last part

of a trip away. You never really know when they are going to come along, so the simple fact is, if you want to catch a really big cod you just need to keep fishing until it happens. Big cod don't come easy - never have in my books. You are in control of how you manage your time on the water. The more casts you can fit in, the better your chances of the lure passing that 'fish of a lifetime' that's ready to go.

## A fish story

Just to finish, I'd like to tell a story of a fish that I caught earlier in the year in my home waters in South Australia. There is a bank I've been fishing for around 15 years, and along this bank is one gnarly old piece of broken-down red gum that just screams 'BIG COD!' Now, I'm not sure whether anyone had ever caught a big cod off that spot or not, but I have cast at this log every season over those 15 years and never caught one. This year, I was working this bank by myself and came to the gnarly looking snag. All it took was one single cast. The lure landed on the upstream side, right near the base of the old log, near the bank, and in the first five or six cranks of the handle there was that unmistakable tick. The rod loaded up, and what ensued was one of the most intense cod fights I've ever had. The fish fought as hard as a large kingfish in the saltwater does. After what seemed like an eternity, an absolutely huge cod of around 40 kg surfaced. I thought to myself, "After all those years and all those casts, it finally slipped up and ate the lure!" We spent a very short moment together and got a quick picture before I watched it disappear back into the depths. If it's a big cod you are after, you just have to never give up.



# Golden perch tournament tactics

## Stephen Booth

Wilson Fishing

Today I would love to take you on the journey that I have been on for the last 18 months - fishing tournaments for golden perch. This journey has highlighted the skill, dedication, gear and techniques the top anglers use and I am really enjoying learning every time I hit the water. I'll talk about three tournament tactics and discuss the gear, method and success rate of each. All of the techniques I discuss will be relevant to any impounded waterway that hosts golden perch, so lakes such as Eildon, Eppalock, Hume, Cairn Curran and more will all have fish that will fall to these techniques.

The three techniques are:

- Blade Fishing the Margins
- Vibe Fishing the Edges
- Grubbing

### Blade Fishing the Margins

Blade Fishing the Margins is all about light lines, light outfits and finesse fishing for big fish.

The outfit I use is a Live Fibre Blade N Tails Ultralight Elite matched to an ATC Carbon Fibre Reel spooled with 8 lb Mustad Thor Brad and topped off with a 6-10 lb fluorocarbon leader. The rod is 7 foot long and rated at 4-8 lb, so just about everyone has a rod that will suit the bill. I was instructed early on that long leaders were required to help keep the more visible braid away from the lure. Generally speaking, we run a leader length of around 3m. The blades we use (regardless of brand) are all fitted with assist hooks. These tiny hooks give excellent hook up rates, hold on well throughout a fight, and demand a lighter and softer rod be used - otherwise you risk snapping or straightening the hooks out.







To start off, we search likely banks with our main sounder, looking for isolated fish in 12-20 foot of water. In most lakes, the goldens have an affinity for rocky areas, so those places are a good starting point. We don't actually cast until we find fish on the sounder, and when we do fish we'll either use a spot-lock function or, if the wind permits, slowly work along the bank with the wind. The reason we work with the wind is to enable us to do long casts with the light lures.

After a cast is made, we allow the lure to settle on the bottom and count to 5, then move the lure ever so slightly and let it settle again. There are two methods I use for this. The first is a very small double rod tip lift. With this method I try to stop lifting the rod as soon as I feel the lure vibrate, which usually gives me about 3-5 beats of the lure. I do this twice, in quick succession, then let the lure settle on the bottom for 5-20 seconds. The second method I use is to shake the lure along the bottom. This is achieved by lifting to get the weight of the lure and jiggling the rod tip without lifting it too far. After the jiggle, I will pause the lure on the bottom again. For some reason, I pause for a shorter period with the jiggle method than the double-lift method.

The goldens can hit at any stage of these retrieves. You can get the classic 'knock' on the pause, an unfamiliar weight, or you can simply lift or jiggle into a fish you didn't even know was there!

With such small hooks and light line, you need to be focused on staying smooth throughout the fight. This is where a softer rod comes into its own. Couple this with an ultra-smooth drag on your reel and you'll find most fish are landed fairly comfortably.

### **Vibe Fishing the Edges**

I'm a recent convert to this method and I am really enjoying it.

The outfit I use for this technique is a 6'10" Bone Drago Baitcaster Rod matched to a 100-sized Baitcaster spooled with 10 lb braid and 10 lb fluorocarbon leader. I've used all manner of vibes for this technique, and I have come away with the conclusion that the way the lure vibrates is not that important because you are imparting all the action into the lure. However, I much prefer rigging up any vibe with a couple of sets of assist

hooks rather than trebles. Yes, you can use trebles, but assist hooks are far more efficient when it comes to hooking fish and landing them.

The method is what I call brutal finesse. The aim is to violently shake the lure without moving it very far along the bottom. You can shake the lure with the rod tip, winding up the slack as the lure settles. Just as in blade fishing, let the lure sit around on the bottom trying not to be noticed before repeating the harsh shake. With this method, the bites are distinct cracks on the lure. You are left in absolutely no doubt a fish has committed to eating your lure. I think this is because the bigger profile of the vibe means the lure is not a simple sip and swallow- it's a crash-tackle the crayfish and smash its claws off! As the tackle is heavier, and the assist hooks are larger and stronger, you can play a bit harder with the vibe-caught fish. Having said that, smooth drags and even pressure are always recommended and will see more fights won than lost.

## Grubbing the trees

This is the most visually entertaining method for chasing golden perch that the tournament anglers use. You actually watch the fish come up and eat your lure on the sounder screen, and it's heart in the mouth stuff!

Gear for grubbing is exactly the same as my blade fishing gear - light, long and sensitive. The outfit I use is a Live Fibre Blade N Tails Ultralight Elite matched to an ATC Carbon Fibre Reel spooled with 8 lb Mustad Thor Brad and topped off with a 6-10 lb fluorocarbon leader. The rod is 7 foot long and rated at 4-8 lb, so everyone will have a rod that will suit the bill. Keep in mind you are never casting a lure, all you are doing is dropping a lure over the side, so a rod that casts a thousand miles is simply not necessary. Over the course of the years, the stand-out jighead has been a 1/4 oz 1/0-sized black Bassman JigHead. Other jig heads work as







well, but all of the elite teams are using this jighead right now - and that's something worth noting.

Grubbing the trees relies on technology more so than any of the other methods. To use this method with the accuracy that the top anglers use, you will need two sounders - a main sounder on the dash for finding fish, and a sounder with a transducer on the bow-mounted electric for fishing to the fish and an electric with a spot-lock feature to hold you in position.

First, you need to scan the trees looking for numbers of fish. Most people do this in DownScan or StructureScan modes. Fish will highlight as brighter marks and are easily visible. The latest Fish Reveal technology is making this job even easier! Once the fish are found on a tree, mark the tree on your sounder as a waypoint and spot-lock it on the mark.

Use the front sounder in sonar mode and you will clearly see any fish underneath the electric motor. They show up as lines and slashes. One tip here is if the line is flat and not moving up and down, you are likely scanning a branch. Fish will move on screen.

If fish are present, simply drop your grub down to the fish in the sonar beam, watching the jighead as it goes down, and stop the fall just as the jig passes the fish. Engage the reel and slow-wind the jig up past the fish. This is where it gets interesting. You will see the fish react to your grub



by following it up or down, or moving away from it. If the fish shows interest, keep winding. If the fish's interest drops off, free spool the grub back to the fish. It's at this point where you may need to talk the fish into eating your lure by shaking it, slow-winding it, pausing it in front of the fish, or even dropping it back past the fish. In amongst all of these options, there will be a trigger retrieve that you can do again and again, scoring fish after fish.

When a fish is hooked, be aware that you are in the thick of the trees where sanctuary is not far away. I don't think goldens deliberately snag you up, but they will use timber if it's there. Work the fish calmly and methodically to the net and success will be yours. One last note - if you do happen to drop a fish in the trees, the chances are it will shut the bite down. Move onto another tree and come back in half an hour when the fish have settled down again.

### Thank You

I've appreciated the chance to talk about some of the tactics golden perch tournament anglers use, and I hope you will go out and give one of these methods a try on your local lake. All three methods work on all the lakes I have fished in over the last 18 months, and the time is 'right now' to have some fun with your local goldens.

We've got a couple of minutes left for a few questions.

# Fishers are constantly learning

**Graeme Dear**

Fishers are constantly learning. Things like techniques, locations and tackle are always changing, and our native fishers have been in the forefront of positive change this past decade.

Major tackle changes like braided line and circle hooks have been adopted readily by people of all ages. The latest change within my area of interest is the use of big surface lures and swimbaits. As per usual, the native fish fraternity has adapted the use of these methods to our native fish, and in many instances has led the charge within the fishing community.

I have noticed other changes; not just changes in the way we fish. I get the sense of a greater value being placed on our fish - valuing of the fish in their own right, and as a resource helping drive our regional economy, even providing health benefits for the people involved. Catch-and-release fishing

is on the rise, allowing another avenue of enjoyment and a greater financial return from each fish. This is not at the expense of catching a fish for a feed and enjoying that experience with our family and friends.

These changes are helping evolve our treatment of the fish themselves. Anglers are conscious of better ways of handling caught fish, thanks to, for example, the Care for Cod campaign. When we keep a fish for a feed, it is also treated with more respect and ends up better table fare to boot. These practices are being handed on, from parents to kids and from mate to mate. To all those who are continuing to learn, keep up the good work. Our native fishery will be better for it.







Photography: Josh Hutchins



Photography: Shottobits









