

NOVEMBER 2024

Recreational Fisheries Management Update

**Bumper snapper
season predicted for
this summer**

**Rescue in motion –
teamwork to bring the
back the catfish**

Record fish stocking



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Catfish on the comeback!

Freshwater catfish (*Tandanus tandanus*) were historically found throughout northern Victoria and the Murray-Darling Basin, reportedly in large numbers. Sadly, this unique species has faced a large decline in numbers since the 1970s due to factors including habitat loss, changes to flow and exotic species such as carp. There are efforts underway to revive these populations, with plans to breed and restock fish from VFA's Arcadia Native Fish Hatchery in the future. However, due to the catfish's low fecundity (egg numbers) compared to other species, this may be a long process.

Hence, the VFA are relocating catfish from the Glenelg River at Casterton (where they've escaped from farm dams, outside their natural range), back to their natural range up north. Utilising the strong partnership that has formed between the VFA, the Casterton Angling Society and the Glenelg-Hopkins CMA, the VFA works with local anglers to sponsor a fishing competition to remove carp and relocate catfish back to their original range, where these breeder fish can reestablish healthy populations.



Stocking success creates estuary perch fishing opportunities statewide!

Anglers are benefiting from the stocking of over 2 million estuary perch into 32 waterways across the state over the last 10 years. This stocking provides great sport fishing opportunities and is rebuilding the populations of one of our native fish species.

More than 260,000 perch have been stocked this past year alone, with Devilbend Reservoir and Albert Park Lake in particular producing some solid catches as a result!

We aren't stopping here though - the stocking continues with the Moyne and Mitta Mitta Rivers being added to the stocking list next year. Visit the VFA stocking database to find the nearest EP waters near you!



Victoria delivers another Talk Wild Trout conference

The Talk Wild Trout Conference attracts anglers, scientists, guides and opinion leaders to share the latest in research, fisheries management, habitat improvements, and trout trends.

The event is hosted by the VFA and Australian Trout Foundation and this year's conference boasted a star-studded lineup, discussing topics including trout fishing tips, mental health, women in recreational fishing, habitat rehabilitation, threatened species recovery and the management of the trout fishery.



Cracking the code on Macquarie perch

The VFA continues to lead the recovery of this nationally listed endangered species through our *Cracking the Code* program. With a collective investment of \$3.7 million through the Fisheries Research and Development Cooperation the VFA is leading a collaborative effort across Victoria and NSW to resolve the mysteries of captive breeding this awesome fish at a large scale. In addition to *Cracking the Code*, the VFA has now totally protected Macquarie Perch in all Victorian waterways to preserve our remaining precious populations of this charismatic fish, that was once a huge part of our freshwater fisheries. Better signage, increased stocking, translocation and monitoring programs are also underway, as well as progress on a dedicated, \$4 million Macquarie perch and trout cod hatchery at Snobs Creek!

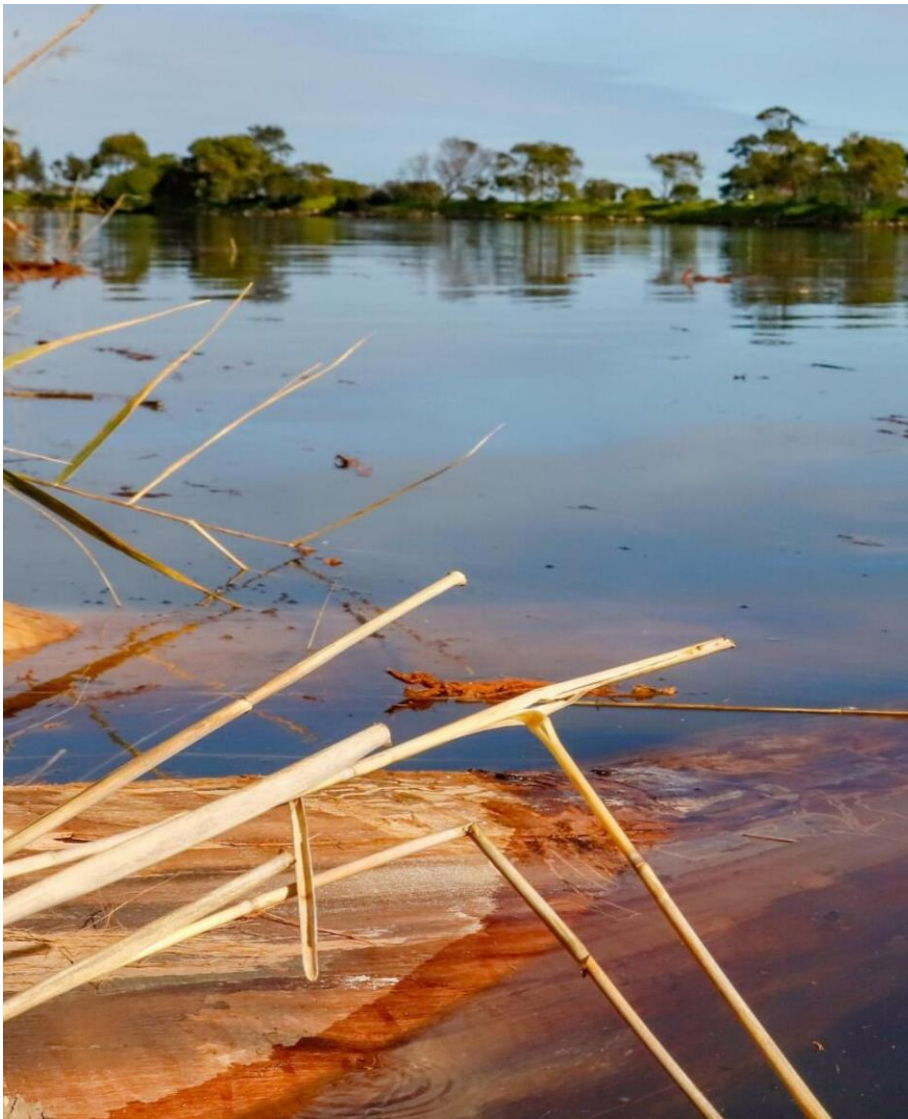
Your contribution helps! A major factor in the VFA securing the funds for Cracking the Code is the ongoing support of recreational fishers across Victoria and NSW.



Some major highlights for this year:

- Specially formulated diets have been developed specifically for our Macca broodstock down at Deakin University's Warrnambool campus.
- The fish are in great condition and, combined with a special temperature and light regime (mimicking wild conditions), we are very excited about the captive spawning effort down there later this month. We will keep you posted!
- *Why is this so important?* Macquarie perch are notoriously hard (read: nearly impossible!) to breed when held in captivity for any length of time. This means we need to take "ripe" fish from the wild every year for our breeding program. If we can crack through this barrier, we can leave the wild fish to do their thing, whilst at the same time increasing the number of fingerlings for stocking each year.
- At Snobs Creek this year we have already had some success hand-spawning some Yarra River Fish and crossing them with fish from King Parrot Creek (a new genetic mix for the program). We're having another crack in a couple of weeks' time with some Dartmouth, Yarra and King Parrot Creek crosses as well: it's all go at the moment for Macca's!
- We are also very excited to have successfully mated a very small sample of eggs from a wild female Macca with a captively reared ("F1") male fish that has never been in the wild.
- It's a long and bumpy road from egg to stocking-ready fingerlings, but it's a big step towards our ultimate goal!
- Our colleagues in NSW at their Narrandera hatchery are also breaking ground on new hormone and spawning techniques for Macca's.





\$2.5 million grants for habitat restoration

In 2022, the Victorian Government committed to a \$2.5 million Fish Habitat Improvement Fund to preserve and improve on Victoria's fantastic fisheries. This is a great opportunity for recreational fishers to work together, improve local fisheries and leave a wonderful legacy for the next generation. There are two ways you can get involved:

Stream 1. Empowering recreational fishers to improve local fish habitat (community led projects up to \$50,000). These projects will deliver small-scale works to improve local fish habitat works alongside waterways such as native vegetation planting, weed control, erosion control and fencing (to keep livestock out) on public or private land. This stream will help recreational fishers get involved, build capacity and establish partnerships with other fish habitat partners and land managers.

Stream 2. Partnerships to address critical fish habitat priorities: working together to restore, recover and rebuild fish populations (up to \$200,000 over 2 years). This stream will deliver larger-scale projects involving multiple partners and strong co-investment to restore, recover fish habitat and contribute to rebuilding fish populations. Applicants for this stream will require strong project management capacity, leadership and connections with recreational fishers and other relevant stakeholders. There are many opportunities across Victoria for improving fish habitat. If you or your club has identified key gaps in fish habitat in your region then we would love to hear from you!

For more information check out our website: vfa.vic.gov.au/fishhabitatfund



Wetland grow out project aiming to boost future fish populations in our waterways

Due to the extensive manipulation of the Murray River floodplain, connectivity between the river and natural wetlands across the floodplain has either been fundamentally altered, or in some instances lost completely. The ramifications for this change on native “floodplain specialist” fish species has been profound. Amongst a raft of impacted species, golden and silver perch are two key recreational species, that are also of significance to the First Nations People of the Murray corridor. VFA stocking efforts focus on the release of ~1g fingerlings into riverine environments, thus missing out on the nursery-development component of their lifecycle. It is strongly suspected that this may be greatly limiting the success of these stocked fish in many instances. Observations by researchers and fishery managers in both Victoria and NSW over several years has pointed to an opportunity to test bringing these two elements together, mimicking the natural cycles of golden and silver perch wetland nurseries. This project is an innovative response to recover threatened native fish by utilising environmental flows, selected wetlands, and native fish stock enhancement practices. By mimicking the natural productivity of flooded wetlands as native fish nurseries, we will stock and grow hatchery reared golden perch (threatened riverine community in Southern Murray Darling Basin, FFG Act) and silver perch (critically endangered, EPBC Act) larvae in three selected wetlands. Juvenile fish will grow rapidly and be harvested, tagged, and liberated into adjoining waterways to rebuild native fish populations on Country.



Record fish stocking in Victoria continues!

In 2023-24 the VFA stocked an all-time record 11.5 million fish into Victoria's lakes and rivers, forming not just a state but national fish stocking record. More than 29.5 million fish have been released into Victorian waters in the three years to July 2024, partly funded from your recreational license fees!

This number includes over 9 million natives and over 1.75 million salmonids, contributing to both the rehabilitation and expansion of our native fisheries, as well as providing quality recreational fishing across the state.

Notably, over 4 million golden perch, and more than 3 million Murray cod were stocked over the 2023-24 period.

Visit the online VFA stocking database to see which waterways were stocked near you!



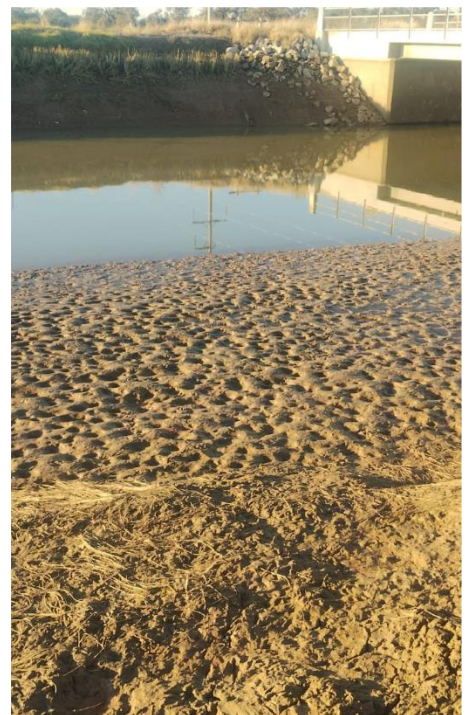
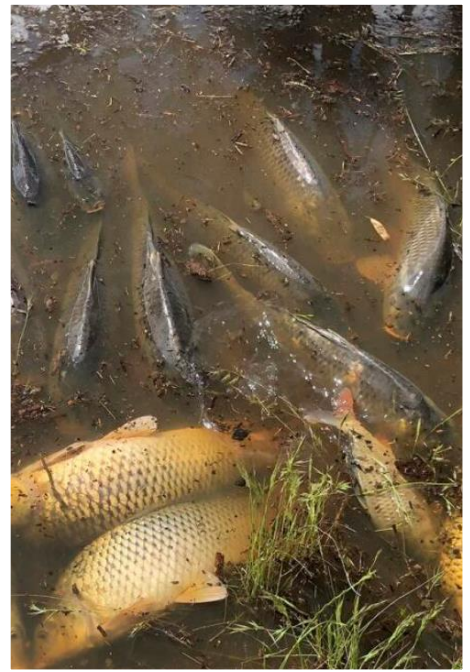
Stocking and new regulations spark Gippsland Lakes fishery comeback

The Gippsland Lakes have always been renowned as a prime fishing location - and it's only getting better. Commercial fishing was phased out in 2020, and the lakes are home to a network of artificial reefs installed and maintained by fisheries, as well as a myriad of other habitat restoration projects. On top of this, the Gippsland Lakes have also received marine stocking, previously being stocked with estuary perch, dusky flathead and even mulloway! Furthermore, one of the most commonly targeted species in the lakes, the black bream, has received a change to restrictions to ensure populations remain booming for years to come. The Gippsland Lakes seemingly have everything going for them at the moment, with some angling clubs stating that this is some of the best fishing they've seen in years. Get out there this summer!



Global cooperation fuels Southern Bluefin Tuna fishery recovery

Another great success story for fisheries management - this time the return of the Southern Bluefin Tuna (SBT). SBT are a highly migratory species, travelling across the world during their lifespan including Australia, Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines and even South Africa. Historically, SBT were typically only caught in the Southwest of Victoria (Portland area), and the stock was suffering due to the difficulties of managing a stock global in nature. But now, partly due to the work of Australian scientists and the implementation of quota management, the stock is now well and truly recovering, and the species has been unlisted as threatened by the IUCN, due to the close work with international partners to address threats to the species. Victorians are now seeing the rewards of this work, with bigger fish being caught right across the coastline - and this summer is only expected to keep providing.



Carp - the recreational fishers enemy

We're concerned that record carp numbers, their breeding success and, their feeding behaviour, will continue to degrade Victoria's waterways, put at risk our threatened native fish and ruin our recreational fisheries. With an estimated 300 million carp in our waterways, we need to get serious about carp control. Over the last decade, research under the National Carp Control Plan has shown that the introduction of the Carp virus could reduce carp numbers by 40 to 60%. This research has been the most comprehensive, expensive, and wide-ranging investigation of its kind in Australian history. While further lab-based carp virus research is being considered by the Federal Government, the VFA are working on a plan to test the effectiveness of the carp virus in a controlled secure and enclosed waterway in Victoria. The trial will test the carp virus on a carp population density typically found in the wild. The trial will answer questions that can't be resolved in small-scale lab trials and inform the wider release of the virus. It's uphill work, but it's progress, and the virus might be our most effective tool to control the menace of carp. If approved for release by the federal government, we aim to have our site ready to go by May 2026.



Bumper snapper season predicted for this spring!

Snapper recruitment (spawning success) is highly variable due to environmental influences. For this reason, the VFA monitors snapper recruitment each year to gain an understanding of how successful the spawning season was, and hence how the fishery will perform in the future.

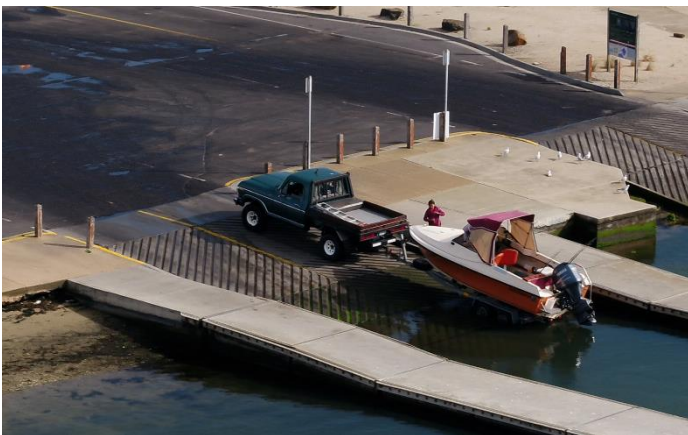
These surveys found that recruitment in 2017/18 was the strongest on record (since 1999/2000). Now that this spawning year class is approaching 7 years of age (approx. 50cm) and maturity, most will begin to join the adult spawning migration in to Port Phillip Bay. As a result, it is anticipated that increased numbers of snapper will be entering Port Phillip and Western Port bays this year.



Recreational boating (and fishing) in Victoria has never been better!

One in 10 Victorians participate in boating in some shape or form. Every year, more and more people are discovering what a great destination Victoria is for boating.

The Victorian Government is proud to be making it cheaper and easier for more Victorian families to enjoy a day on the water by abolishing all fees across all of Victoria's 420 odd public boat ramps.



Avalon completed!



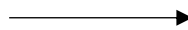
Lake Boga completed!



Barkers Creek completed!



Mahers Landing before



Mahers Landing now



Better Boating Victoria - Update

Upgrades have already been completed at Rhyll, Hastings, Mordialloc, Queenscliff, Point Richards, Warrnambool, Lake Bullen Merri, Lake Buffalo, Waranga Basin, Mahers Landing and Cape Conran, to name a few, with more on the way.

Work is well underway on detailed designs and the necessary approvals for future upgrades at Karadoc (Murray River), Warneet, Anthonys Nose, Shepparton Weir, Seymour Manners St, Blue Rock Lake and Altona.