

Good advice from anglers

NATASHA CHILDS LETS US IN ON THE STORIES OF SOME RECREATIONAL FISHERS WHO ARE SHARING THEIR LOCAL KNOWLEDGE TO BOOST INLAND FISH NUMBERS.



Local knowledge is a valuable tool in the management of inland rivers. Recreational fishers are on the water regularly, they see the rise and fall of waterways, changes in the health of nearby bushland and variation in their catches. Water managers are now combining the passion and experience of local anglers with the best available science and expertise to ensure a sustainable future for fish and fishing in local rivers.

In southern New South Wales, this important partnership is yielding promising results for water managers and fishing enthusiasts alike. Wayne and Debbie Lennon, owners of Oar-Gee Lures, recently took part in a field trip with staff from the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH), Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries (DPI), DPI Water and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office to collaborate and share their local knowledge about fish in the region.

For Wayne Lennon, the field trip provided direct access to information about the work being done to re-instate flows that native fish need to breed, feed and thrive.

“We’ve built our business on understanding the needs of native fish—creating lures to target yellow belly [Golden Perch] and cod [Murray Cod], as well as other species. Since the field trip, we have an even better understanding about what native fish require in terms of habitat and flows in a regulated river.

“In the days before river regulation, you could walk across the Murrumbidgee River in summer, but in winter you didn’t have a chance. These days, it’s the opposite. Back in the day, spring storms would put a pulse through the river, prompting fish to spawn. The next season, you could be guaranteed there would be plenty of fish, but it’s different now. Dams capture the rain, and when water is released it’s often at the wrong time of year to benefit native fish.

“I’ve been fishing for 60 years but until recently I didn’t understand the importance of blackwater for feeding native fish. I used to think that blackwater killed ‘my fish’. Like most people, I was ready to blame anybody without knowing what actually caused it. I now know there’s good blackwater and bad blackwater.

“Regular flushing flows—at the right time of year—help to feed the rivers and the native fish. Natural flows and environmental water have an important role to play in the process.

“Bad blackwater—the type that takes the oxygen out of the water and kills fish—can be exacerbated by no flows or badly-timed flows, allowing carbon to build up on the floodplain. We need to start putting the rivers first. By all working together we can make good things happen,” Wayne said.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

www.environment.nsw.gov.au/environmentalwater/what-is-it.htm

Troy Bright has been fishing the Deniliquin area for more than 30 years. He is a strong advocate for combining the efforts of local communities and government agencies to achieve positive outcomes for all river users.

“There is a lot of great work being done locally to support native fish populations and provide benefits for communities up and down the river. Managing water to support the lifecycle needs of native fish is one of the most important strategies.

“When I was growing up, native fish were hard to come by. I was out on the river regularly, but it wasn’t until I was 18 or 19 that I angled my first Murray Cod. I’ve noticed a big difference since the introduction of environmental flows. Native fish numbers are increasing.

“There’s a lot of other work being done as well. Re-snagging has seen a massive increase in the number of native fish in some sections of the river, and landholders have been fencing riparian zones to rehabilitate stream banks and protect these important sources of shelter and food for native fish. Water managers have worked with irrigation companies to use irrigation escapes to create fresh water refuge pools for native fish during hypoxic blackwater events.

“In Deniliquin, we’ve also been working to establish a fish park at Brown’s Lagoon. It’s a place where people from all walks of life can come to experience fishing and learn about the great native fish that live in our rivers. The fish park is in the heart of town so it’s easy to access for tourists, recreational fishers, students and the community.

“All of these projects mean money for our towns. Good fishing brings tourists to town. Upgrading water infrastructure means work for tradies. Environmental water also means additional income for irrigation companies when their infrastructure is used for delivery.

“Best of all, our rivers are healthier and native fish can make a comeback,” Troy said.

OEH senior environment water manager Paul Childs joined the field trip to give local fishers a fresh perspective on work being done.

“The knowledge and enthusiasm of recreational fishers is a fantastic resource for local communities. By working with local people, we can achieve practical outcomes with multiple benefits—not just healthy rivers and improved fish populations but economic benefits for towns as well.

“As water managers, we want to share our knowledge and learn from the skills and experience of people who are out on the rivers every week. We all have a passion for local rivers for lots of different reasons. Finding the common ground and building on it will mean terrific outcomes for fish, for anglers and communities.

“It’s an exciting field to be working in and seeing the passion and enthusiasm of local people who want to look after their rivers is fantastic. We are looking forward to continuing our work with local anglers and fishing clubs on some great outcomes for everyone,” Paul said.

In 2012, Deloitte Economic valued recreational fishing in the Murray valley at just over \$200 million per annum. Across New South Wales, recreational fishing provides an estimated economic boost of close to \$1 billion. Bringing together local fishing knowledge, and with the scientific and practical understanding of water managers, is a match that will result in even better outcomes for fish and the habitats they need to survive and thrive.