



Fostering a sustainable freshwater fishery

30 November 2015

Comments on the Natural Resources Commission Issues Paper - State Wide Review of NSW Pest Animal Management

About the NSWCFCA and freshwater recreational angling

The NSWCFCA is the largest and most active freshwater recreational angling organisation in Australia. The NSWCFCA represents 67 recreational angling clubs and associations across NSW.

The NSWCFCA works closely with, and is a major stakeholder with, DPI-Fisheries in the management of NSW pest fish and conservation/restoration of native fish and their habitats. A significant part of Recreational Fishing Fees collected from recreational anglers (approx \$15M each year) is spent on research, restocking and encouraging native fish through riparian and waterway restoration.

The NSWCFCA believes that building strong populations of native fish, together with other means of control, will help to combat the spread of pest fish. This can be achieved by maximising conditions to favour natural recruitment of native fish and minimising conditions that favour pest species. The NSWCFCA believes that the key elements in achieving these are: improving water conditions, research, improving habitat both in waterways and in riparian zones and restocking.

Health, social and economic benefits of recreational fishing

Policy advisers often overlook the value of recreational fishing. In order to understand why certain pest animal issues should have priority, it is necessary to understand the health, social and economic values of the sector.

Formal studies have shown that recreational fishing contributes significantly to improving health and well-being and provides many social benefits, particularly for rural and regional communities. In 2011 a report titled "Identifying the health and well-being benefits of recreational fishing" (<http://cessh.curtin.edu.au/local/docs/RecFishinglr.pdf>) found that, although difficult to quantify, considerable health and well-being benefits can be gained from recreational fishing. Recreational fishing is one of the few forms of nature-based recreation that can be enjoyed throughout childhood, adolescence, adulthood and into the senior years.

The economic benefits of recreational fishing are also significant. In 2015 the economic output for recreational fishing in all NSW was estimated to be \$3.42 Bn (www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/499302/UOW-statewide-economic-survey-final-report.pdf). In 2011, an estimated 21% of NSW Murray Darling Basin residents over 5 yo were recreational anglers. The economic contribution by recreational angling in the Murray Darling Basin was estimated to be \$1.352 Bn of direct expenditure, \$375M for direct value-added expenditure, contributing \$403M to GDP and providing 11000 jobs (http://www.fishhabitatnetwork.com.au/userfiles/EconomicContributionofRecFishingintheMDBFinalReport08_08_20112.pdf).

The spread of pest fish species is a significant threat to the viability of recreational freshwater fisheries in NSW, the loss of which will have serious, detrimental social and economic effects in NSW.

Lack of acknowledgement of freshwater pest species

Although the terms of reference of the Issues Paper includes 'freshwater vertebrate species' the content of the Paper has almost no mention of freshwater pest animals. This fact appears to be being addressed by the holding of aquatic pest focus groups. The NSWCFCA was represented by the President, Don Barton, at one such focus group held in Sydney on 23 October 2015.

Primary Issues in Pest Fish Management

The aquatic pest focus group identified three primary issues in the management of pest species as being **research, education and communication**. Communication and several other issues are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Communication

There is a need to have more effective communications with the public on freshwater biosecurity issues. For example, messages relating to pest fish should be expressed in a manner and be available in media that would most likely get the message to those who need to see/hear it. NSWCFCA recommends that marketing or advertising specialists be engaged periodically to advise on the manner and means of effective communication re pest animals.

Water Management

Although the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) is responsible for managing the ecology of the State's waterways and pest fish, most of NSW waterways are regulated by various water authorities and commercial users such as irrigators, hydro-electric and thermal power generators, miners and National Parks. Water managers play an important role in regulating water levels in dams and the release of water into river systems. These releases can and do have significant effect on the viability of native and pest fish alike. Water release

regimes can be designed to take into account and support the recruitment of native fish species but equally, release regimes can support the recruitment of pest fish. Also, environmental releases of water may be made to support water birds and wetlands but these same flows may lead to the breeding of millions of carp. The NSWCFR recommends that water managers, as critical stakeholders, be included in strategic planning for control of freshwater pest species.

Interrelationship between land pests and aquatic systems

There can also be an inter-relationship between land pests and aquatic systems. Land pest animals such as feral pigs and goats can have a serious impact on fish habitat. Feral pigs and goats have been found to have destroyed riparian habitat, particularly in upper reaches of waterways, which leads to erosion and siltation of important spawning areas for native fish. In lower reaches pest animals, and also wild cattle, can cause damage to waterways which cause increased turbidity which is unsuitable for native fish but suits carp in particular. For example, feral pigs have been rooting up stream beds and adjacent riparian areas during low water periods in the habitat of Macquarie perch in National Parks. Extensive pig rootings have been observed along Cocks River, affecting trout and Eastern Macquarie Perch habitat. Similar damage to Bass habitat along the Nepean River has also been observed.

Funding for the control of freshwater pest animals

Planning, monitoring and research projects are key elements that allow informed decisions in managing freshwater pest animals. Currently these are carried out by DPI-Fisheries with a large recurrent funding contribution from recreational fishing fees. In addition, freshwater anglers contribute many hundreds of hours of unpaid/in-kind work in support of habitat restoration, restocking and some "citizen science" work.

Local Land Services charge rates on all parcels of land deemed to be rateable under the The Local Land Services Act 2013. Part of these funds are used to finance land Biosecurity and Animal Health services to commercial users of land. Freshwater Biosecurity appears to be severely underfunded in comparison to land Biosecurity.

To address this underfunding, the NSWCFR agrees with a proposal put forward by the Monaro Acclimatisation Society for a levy on water-users. The NSWCFR recommends that a freshwater biosecurity levy be instituted and applied to commercial users of freshwater from NSW waterways.

Regulation and Compliance

The NSWCFR believes that current legislation relating to the possession, release etc of live freshwater pest fish is not clear enough to deter the spread of freshwater pest fish. The spread of redfin, for example, has caused enormous harm to valuable trout fisheries,

impacting on the numbers of tourist anglers travelling to areas such as Oberon, Wyangala or parts of the Snowy Mountains. For example, the relevant provisions presently contained in Section 211 of the Fisheries Management Act are not entirely clear as to the defence to a charge of possession of live pest fish.

The NSWCFCA recommends that relevant legislation is drafted in very clear and unambiguous terms to further discourage the spread of freshwater pest fish.

Strategic planning and representation

Biosecurity is all about protecting the economy, human health and the environment from problems associated with freshwater pests. Freshwater anglers are the eyes and ears of biosecurity and can provide early warning of pest animals and their effects on waterways, on communities and on the environment in general. Freshwater anglers also participate in citizen science projects with DPI. As such freshwater anglers are important stakeholders in improving viable freshwater fisheries, including the control of pest species.

The NSWCFCA recommends that recreational anglers be included in biosecurity planning and consultation, as should other stakeholders such as water authorities and major commercial water users.

J.A.Robb

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