

FISH IN THE LOWER COTTER CATCHMENT

(BENDORA DAM TO COTTER DAM)

The lower Cotter River contains populations of two threatened fish species, Macquarie Perch (*Macquaria australasica*) and Two-spined Blackfish (*Gadopsis bispinosus*).

Macquarie Perch is a nationally threatened species and has been declared “endangered” in the ACT. Two-spined Blackfish are not listed nationally but have been declared “vulnerable” in the ACT. The Lower Cotter Catchment also contains Mountain Galaxias (*Galaxias olidus*) particularly in the smaller tributary streams of the Cotter River.

Macquarie Perch

Macquarie Perch were once widespread throughout the cooler upper reaches of the Murray-Darling Basin. However, its current distribution is now fragmented and only small discrete populations remain. In the ACT there has been long-term reduction in the numbers of Macquarie Perch in the Murrumbidgee River. In the lower Cotter River a population is present in Cotter Reservoir and the river upstream.



Macquarie Perch (*Macquaria australasica*).
Maximum size of Macquarie Perch 46cm, 3.5kg

Two-spined Blackfish

Two-spined Blackfish were present in the Murrumbidgee River in the ACT until the mid 1960's, but is now restricted to the Cotter River and its reservoirs.



Two-spined Blackfish (*Gadopsis bispinosus*)
Maximum size of Two-spined Blackfish 30cm and 250gm

Recent work on the distribution of Macquarie Perch and Two-spined Blackfish found that Macquarie Perch expanded their range in the lower Cotter River since the construction of a fish-way at Vanities Crossing in 2001. Macquarie Perch have now been recorded successfully breeding above Vanities Crossing. However, numbers of Two-spined Blackfish have declined in the lower Cotter River since the 2003 bushfires. This decline is possibly due to an increase in sediment, smothering spaces between rocks that Two-spined Blackfish use as shelter and breeding habitat.

Alien fish species present in the lower Cotter River include Eastern Gambusia (*Gambusia holbrooki*); Oriental Weatherloach (*Misgurnus anguillicaudatus*); Goldfish (*Carassius auratus*); Rainbow Trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*); and Brown Trout (*Salmo trutta*). Carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) and Redfin Perch (*Perca fluviatilis*), alien fish species common in the Murrumbidgee River, are not known to occur above the Cotter Dam.

Threats to fish

The Cotter River fish populations are currently free from a number of exotic fish parasites, such as *Lernaea* (a parasite of Carp), and diseases, such as Epizootic Haematopoietic Necrosis Virus (EHNV; carried by Redfin Perch).

The effects of introduced parasites and diseases on native fish can be severe with EHNV a notable case. This disease can be transported from one water body to another either on live fish, through water transfer or on fishing lines, boats and other fishing tackle. This disease is widespread in Canberra's urban lakes and the Murrumbidgee River but has not established in the Cotter system, probably due to the absence of the common carrier species (Redfin Perch), a policy of not stocking fish species for recreational fishing (since 1980's) and restricted fishing access.

EHNV has been shown to infect several native fish species, including some which occur in the Cotter River catchment. In particular, the threatened Macquarie Perch has been shown in laboratory trials to have 100 per cent mortality to EHNV. Measures to prevent EHNV from entering the Cotter River system are therefore critical to survival of Macquarie Perch populations.

Please help protect our native fish

To help protect Macquarie Perch and Two-spined Blackfish populations in the lower Cotter River, fishing is currently restricted to the stretch of river downstream from Bendora Dam to the Pierces Creek confluence, which is currently designated trout waters. Fishing in other areas of the Cotter Catchment is prohibited under the *ACT Fisheries Act 2000*. People fishing in designated trout fishing area are required to note and adhere to the following:

- Return any caught Macquarie Perch, Two-spined Blackfish Trout Cod, and Murray River Crayfish to the river unharmed;
- Follow gear, bag and size limits advised in *the ACT Fisheries Act 2000*;
- Live bait is prohibited as it may carry parasites and diseases; and
- No plants, animals or water from outside the Cotter River are to be moved into the Cotter River.

Further information can be obtained from the Department of Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS) website at:

www.tams.act.gov.au/live/environment/water/recreational_fishing_in_the_act