

River Murray snags to benefit native fish

Native fish will benefit from improved habitat in the River Murray between Lake Hume and Yarrowonga thanks to a 'resnagging' project funded through The Living Murray – the biggest of its kind ever undertaken in Australia.

Throughout the next three years trees will be placed in parts of the river to act as habitat for fish to spawn, feed and to avoid predators.

"Woody habitat is vital for the survival and growth of many native fish species, such as Golden Perch, Murray Cod and Trout Cod – many of which are threatened species due to lack of habitat and shelter in this section of the River Murray," Murray-Darling Basin Commission (MDBC) Chief Executive, Dr Wendy Craik said.

"Snags have traditionally been removed from rivers to make them navigable, or because it was believed that they caused additional flooding at times of peak flow.

"However, snags are now viewed in a different light – research has shown that they are vital for healthy functioning rivers," Dr Craik said. "They could also help reverse the decline in native fish numbers in this part of the River Murray, where they are dangerously low.

"This resnagging project under The Living Murray and the Native Fish Strategy is another step towards improving the river environment for our native fish.

"We will be resnagging three sections of the river – all up, a length of 35km. This will provide around 100 km of connected habitat for fish to swim and breed between Lake Mulwala and Howlong," Dr Craik said.

The CEO of the North East Catchment Management Authority, Mr John Riddiford said "Resnagging will be done to minimise impact on recreational uses of the river and the sites have been selected to maximise the environmental benefits while keeping the social and economic costs to a minimum"

The snags will be sourced from trees cleared from local freeway construction, including the Hume Highway Albury duplication and other development sites.

Phase one of the project in 2006 aims to improve fish habitat around Boiling Down Creek, below Corowa. Future phases will focus on areas of the river upstream.

According to David Harriss, the NSW Department of Natural Resources Executive Director of Water Management, the resnagging project will complement other river management works undertaken in this stretch of the River Murray, including erosion control works and revegetation.

The resnagging project is a partnership of the Victorian North East Catchment Management Authority, NSW Department of Natural Resources, NSW Department of Primary Industries (Fisheries), Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment, and the MDBC. Funding has been provided by the Australian, NSW, Victorian, and South Australian governments through The Living Murray program.

Dr Wendy Craik, Murray-Darling Basin Commission Chief Executive, will be available for interviews both at and prior to the event. Pre-event interviews will take place at Corowa airstrip from 10.30am-11.00am. For further details, contact Sandra Volk on ph: 0434 602411.

Photo opportunity: A project launch will be occurring at 11.30am, 18th August 2006 on banks of the River Murray near Corowa, with snags and resnagging equipment for viewing.

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