



# WRFC8 Canada / USA 2017

CHAMPION ANGLERS STUDY TOUR

FISHER REPORTS

## **Report by Braeden Lampard**

### **Key lessons learnt**

The trip was a once in a life time experience, and I am so ever grateful to be given the opportunity. I learnt so much from the discussions and to see the environmental work sites that we visited. The world recreational conference also provided great insight into the research that is being undertaken from the world leaders in recreational fishing research. I also enjoyed meeting and discussing the future with the group from the FRDC sponsored trip, to be able to meet and discuss new technology and their experience was an amazing opportunity.

To be able to get all the information down from what I learnt would take 5 pages but here are the main lessons that I learnt from the trip.

You need community groups like Trout Unlimited who solely have recreational angler's members to help with environmental programs. Community groups like these people need to be involved from the early stages and be consulted with for any works, rules or regulations changes. Recreational anglers and community groups like these are the ones being affected by the works and regulation changes and they need to know why it is happening and then get them involved to take ownership of their environment.

In Australia, unfortunately in most cases we have government agencies and community groups fighting against each other or misinterpreting what they are trying to achieve. It was great to see that government and community agencies working together and they are both invested in a healthy future for fish and the environment. Also, they worked together with up to date research to show the general community on why or what they are doing. It proved, although we are in the "teething stage" that it is possible and it is something that we can work towards. I will personally be seeking to lead by example and work closely with government agencies in the near future in any recreational grant or environmental program that is undertaken.

It seems that America and Canada are years ahead of us in certain ways regarding involving recreational anglers in environmental programs and on ground work. Although, having discussions with other researchers and anglers at the World Recreational Fishing Conference, they thought from the presentations that fellow Australians presented that we were a world ahead of them. I believe that we should learn from each other's experiences and see what they did right and they did wrong.

A great lesson that I took from the study tour is that any project either as big as removing a dam wall or providing easy fishing access for recreational anglers you need to involve the people who are being affected from the early stages and you need support from community groups.

We should all be working towards a healthy future; this would be government agencies, community groups and recreational anglers. If we all joined forces to work towards a one world, one basin, one future we would see significant changes in a short time.

### **Activities I would like to see in NSW**

The main activities I would like to see implemented in NSW waterways would be:

More recreational anglers being involved with environmental programs or community groups like OzFish Unlimited or local fishing clubs. This would help recreational anglers have more ownership of their own waterway and have them be involved with creating a better future for native fish, then this would create a better future for them. Getting this message across has proven to be difficult but with champion anglers like Matt, Anne and I we can work together to help create a new way of thinking.

Changing the view of recreational anglers from re-stocking to re-snagging. Re-stocking has got its pro's but with updated research indicating that there are better ways to help improve the future for fish like re-snagging there should be more information or educating the public for this.

Using up to date research to help influence decision making or supporting environmental programs and then translating that information to community groups or recreational anglers to help and steer them in the best way to support the environment. Overall, it was a great insight to see where Australia could be in the near future.

The projects could be weir removals, fish screens on pumps and a range of other small and large projects that enhance recreational fishing.

### **What I will do now**

I would like to ignite the passion that I have, within other recreational anglers hearts, not just on a regional scale but on a state and country scale. I plan to share that knowledge to other fishing clubs and try to inspire them to take a lead on restoring their native fish habitat. The restoration programs were world leading and with the knowledge and experience that I have gained through the trip, I will be working closely with community members to pass that information on. I will be showing how recreational anglers, government agencies and community groups can work closely together, and we can both learn and exchange information then we can achieve and create a brighter future for the fresh water native fishes. I will be explaining to recreational anglers that they should get involved in their local community groups, and showing them how it feels to make a difference and to leave a better future for the generations of recreational anglers that are to come.

I have created an OzFish Unlimited chapter called Sunraysia OzFish, since returning from the trip I have been creating interest and gaining members. I hope that this chapter can be a go to place for community members to find up to date research or information regarding their native fish nursery. Through my passion and experience I can inspire and ignite other community groups to take a lead in fish habitat restoration. When applicable, I will apply for government grants; if successful I plan to work closely with government agencies and other community members to help undertake programs that will benefit the environment and everyone who relays on, that being either native fish, humans and all other living organisms.

I hope to be a young recreational angler who is looked up to by other community members and government employees. I will be working closely with other community groups and joining forces to engage other anglers and or people who just like to enjoy the outdoors. By joining forces and proudly broadcasting what can be achieved, hopefully this will help other community members understand that they are important and the environment needs their help.

### **Highlights (light bulb moment)**

At the Olympic National Park, it was our first official visit for a rehabilitation program that had been undertaken. The Glines Canyon Dam was a large dam wall that been built in the early 1900's to create electricity for booming towns nearby. But, in the late 1900's to early 2000's the electricity was being supplied from other sources and the dam remained as a barrier for fish passage. The wall had started to be torn down in the 2011 and once the wall had been fully dismantled there were local reports that native fish had been seen past the dam wall within 1 to 2 days after the operation had finished. This truly amazed me, I lived on the Murray River and there are significant fish passage barriers. There has been a lot of work in the past 10 years to help the native fish through fishways and other environmental works but it would be great to see weirs removed that are not necessarily being used for what it was first designed to do. I first thought of the weirs that are located in the lower Murray River, weirs that are from Locks 6-9 that could potentially be removed, as one side of the Murray River is a large National park and the other side is used only for grazing or dry land

farming. Obviously the irrigation pumps may need lowering but a large scale environmental works like this could be world leading.

I would like to sincerely thank everyone who has been involved in the trip, I am so ever grateful to be chosen to represent the recreational anglers of NSW. This trip has been opened my mind to a whole new world and it will prove to be a game changer. I hope that I can fulfil my big dreams of becoming an inspiration and an Australian leader for recreational angling in environmental programs, especially in habitat restoration programs.

I would also like to thank Craig Copeland for the trip. He is a great inspiration and it was an amazing opportunity to have so much wealth and knowledge in the palm of my hands for 2 weeks. Just from having discussions with Craig, I have written down 4 pages of potential programs that I can undertake, and how they can be undertaken to achieve the best outcome.

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## Report by Anne Michie

### Key Learnings – Highlights

- The scale and array of projects visited during our study tour showed that perseverance and persistence will eventually build better outcomes for fish and fishers. A project on the Lower Clackamas River we visited showed how Trout Unlimited volunteers working with Fish and Wildlife Staff were able to restore a section of river that had previously been used as a gravel quarry. The works had used some very innovative thinking in using Xmas trees, donated by the public, as part of instream structure and bank stabilization. The project also had a small tributary creek rehabilitated and water flow enhanced to ensure a successful nursery was available for juvenile fish spawned in the adjacent Clackamas River. Both of these projects had taken several years to plan before any on ground works were undertaken and the replanting and maintenance has been ongoing for over 10 years to achieve suitable habitat for fish breeding and rearing.
- A particular project on the Icicle River in Washington State was a great example of how long-term planning and project management can achieve outcomes favorable for fish habitat while also meeting the needs of other water users and stakeholders. The project involves the removal of a mother rock in the river blocking fish passage while including the rerouting of entire offtake for municipal water supply, to enable 200 breeding pairs of fish to pass upstream to spawn. We in Australia would not think this a significant enough number of breeding fish to warrant a multimillion dollar project.
- Stewardship on the rivers was a recurring theme with local landholders and water users accepting responsibility and ownership of the watershed (catchment) as a whole.
- Trout Unlimited employees were tasked with finding funding for their projects and also to cover salary costs and seemed at ease with this process.
- The education programs rolled out by Trout Unlimited to ensure the next generation will automatically adopt the principles of sustainable and ethical fishing were tailored to each catchment and kept simple and relevant.
- My discussions at the WRF Conference with members of the Bonefish and Tarpon Trust brought to light that fisheries all over the world are facing similar habitat issues. Worldwide the problems of poor water quality, reduced flows, barriers to fish passage, migration and habitat loss are problems that recreational anglers and fisheries managers need to work together to overcome.
- Learnings from research on artificial reefs of WA to seagrass beds in Florida to riparian on inland rivers all bring similar issues but sometimes new and fresh approaches on how to overcome problems faced in managing habitat losses in our fisheries.
- The issue of screening offtakes to limit fish harm and mortality was a definite eye opener. Legislation was used in a backhanded way, not to enforce mandatory screening, but rather that if water users harm any animal (fish or frog) on the protected list the user will be prosecuted, therefore fish screens on water offtakes are a given. This amazing attitude comes after decades of irrigators using screens that don't present problems or reduce productivity and with funding and maintenance support from Government.

### Where to now in NSW

- One of the major issues facing fish stocks in NSW that requires addressing is the application of fish screening technology on all water offtakes, both municipal and irrigation. Working with major

water license holders and adapting the technology to suit Aussie conditions will achieve better outcomes for fish stocks to increase and stabilize.

- The insight I have gained as a part of this tour and attending the WRFC has strengthened my resolve and ignited the passion to educate local anglers and irrigators on the importance of habitat for healthy and thriving fisheries. One aim, through organized OzFish events, on the Peel and Namoi rivers with hands on works will give me the opportunity to inspire and lead local anglers and water users to understand the importance of river health.
- I see my role as a champion of recreational anglers on the Basin Plan and Engaged Fishers to provide a connecting pathway between fisheries management and the fishing community. I will be able to ensure the concerns and ideas of local anglers in the north west has a voice heard at management level and also to bring back current policy and projects to my local area for discussion and implementation.
- In my local area of North West NSW I will be building a Chapter of Ozfish Unlimited our aim will be to undertake firstly small projects along the Peel and Namoi Rivers to show anglers, community and government departments that fish habitat can be improved and in turn river health restored while productivity is maintained for irrigators and all stakeholders along the rivers.
- I would like to develop and implement an education unit aimed at primary school students that could be delivered either by a non-Government agency to promote the importance of habitat in creating sustainable and enjoyable fisheries for everyone and in turn healthy, happy and vibrant communities. This project could be tailored to suit individual catchment and communities to maintain relevance and importance to students.

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## Report by Matthew Hansen

In short- this tour was the best experience of my life. As a passionate fisher, and fish habitat project coordinator, to have the opportunity to be exposed to world leading fish stock improvement projects was an opportunity that I sincerely appreciate, and will never forget.

The insight and exposure to world leading fish stock improvement projects was an incredibly eye opening experience, with both the American and Canadian attitude to recovering and bettering fish stocks truly inspirational.

Key lessons that I learnt included:

- 1) The power of collaboration with likeminded stakeholders groups is paramount in achieving fish habitat, and fish stock improvement related outcomes.
- 2) Things take time- for example the opening of fish passage at the Elwha Dam was kicked off well over twenty years before the project was completed. This helped me steel myself, and understand process.
- 3) Collaboration with groups who may not be recreational fishing focused is a powerful thing, even if the goals and objectives of the groups do not align totally, big outcomes can be achieved.

There were several “light bulb” moments during the tour for me personally, with the most significant relating to fish screening and irrigation pumps. After seeing the technology used in the field, and having a run through with irrigation managers and Oregon Fish and Wildlife staff, I honestly felt a real sense of ‘WE CAN DO THIS!’.

Our group shared many of our stories to audiences back home, often showing daily what we had discovered about techniques and projects used overseas to improve fish habitats and fish stocks. A series of travel blogs that were posted to social media for our fellow fishers to watch back home was watched by tens of thousands of viewers before we even arrived home. Staggeringly, our viewership increased as we made our way along the tour path, with one posted video relating to fish screening gaining over 16, 000 views to date, with overwhelmingly positive feedback from fishers in NSW.

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I now aim to apply, implement and inspire my fellow recreational fishers through this amazing experience. I would like to sincerely thank the Recreational Fishing Trust and NSW DPI Fisheries for this incredible opportunity to grow my understanding of how to improve fish stocks.