

THE UPPER BIDGEE REACH



Volume 1, Issue 1

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UPPER MURRUMBIDGEE DEMONSTRATION REACH

Welcome to the first edition of the UMDR newsletter

Welcome and thanks for your interest in the Upper Murrumbidgee Demonstration Reach (UMDR).

This is the first quarterly newsletter for this exciting fish habitat initiative that aims to improve native fish habitat through a 100km section of the upper Murrumbidgee River between Bredbo (NSW) and Casuarina Sands reserve (ACT).

Within the newsletter series we aim to provide an up to date summary of what is happening in the reach and related projects, new plans and developments and ways in which you can get involved and help support the recovery of native fish and their habitat in the region.

We hope you enjoy finding out more about the local river environment, especially the local fish communities and their habitat, threats facing fish and fish habitat in the local upland region, and where possible contributing to the recovery of this very special environment.

Suggestions, contributions and feedback are always welcome and you can contact the project manager and other members of the team at any time to provide input to the project or the newsletter.

Here's looking forward to a better 'bidgee!



The Murrumbidgee at sunset, Tharwa Sandwash Reserve (ACT).

Photo: Luke Johnston



Upper Bidgee Reach online!

www.upperbidgeereach.org.au



All information, progress, plans, brochures, maps and newsletters produced for the Upper Bidgee Reach are now accessible online.

The website allows you to easily access information background information about the reach and the history behind demonstration reaches through the Native Fish Strategy (Murray-Darling Basin Authority), as well as find out what's happening in the reach, download plans, maps and other documents.

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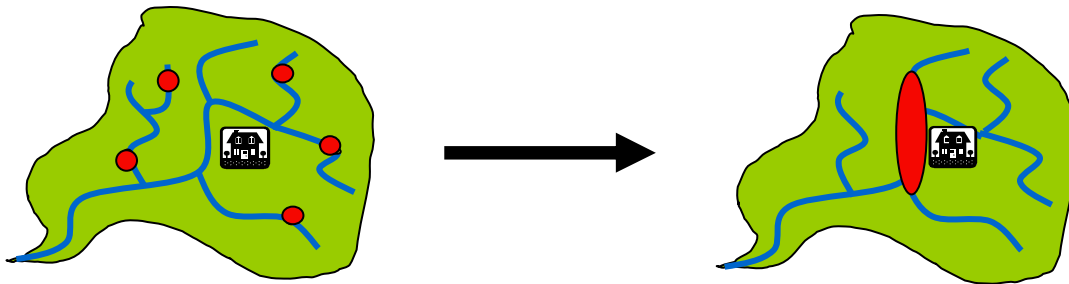
What is a 'demonstration reach'?

It is widely accepted that native fish across the Murray-Darling Basin have declined to about 10% of pre-European levels over the past 200+ years. Demonstration reaches are an initiative of the Native Fish Strategy for the Murray-Darling Basin which aims to restore native fish populations to 60% of those pre-European levels across the Basin within the next 50 years.

Demonstration reaches draw heavily on traditional river rehabilitation projects and knowledge that typically occur at single sites using single interventions (such as re-snagging or riparian rehabilitation). However they differ in that they are large scale (in the order of 100 river km) and aim to showcase ('demonstrate!') the cumulative benefits of many management interventions along a **single** river reach in close proximity to a major population centre, such as in our case where we have Canberra, the biggest inland city in Australia.

An important aspect of demonstration reaches is community enthusiasm and involvement. Being close to Canberra means that more people can get involved, learn about how attempting to 'fix' many things in a single reach has better flow-on benefits to the river, as well as actively participate in decision making, lobbying various agencies to support the initiative and get their 'hands dirty' on the river helping out with tree plantings for example and undertaking river health monitoring.

"An important aspect of demonstration reaches is community enthusiasm and involvement"



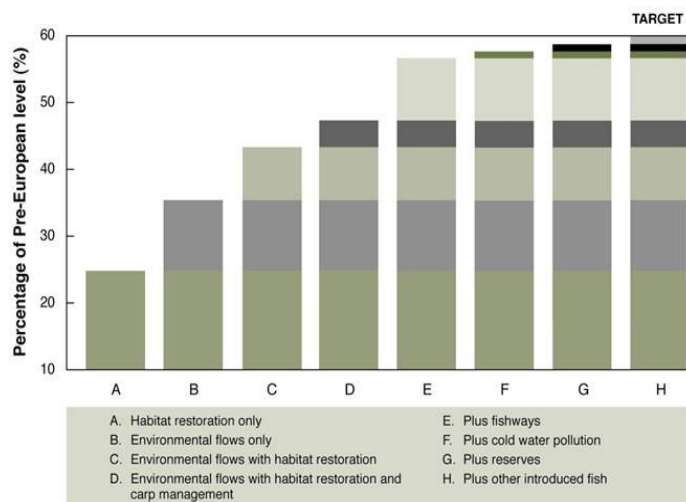
The diagram above (left) shows an example of how catchment wide river rehabilitation has typically taken place until recently.

The red dots represent work sites where an individual project may have taken place such as, for example, at one site willows may have been removed, at another a fish ladder may have been put in, at even another some re-snagging may have been done etc.

As shown here not all of these projects always take place close to where people can easily access or see what is happening, such as close to a regional centre (shown as a house on the diagram).

The idea of a demonstration reach (on the right) to move away from isolated projects and put all available management options within a single river reach near the local regional centre. This provides bigger 'bang for your buck' by making a greater difference at the site and allowing everyone to see and learn about what is happening and being able to easily get involved.

The graph below is taken from the Native Fish Strategy and illustrates how more things happening at a single site bring back more fish (closer to the target of 60%).



For more general information about the Native Fish Strategy see links inside:

www.upperbidgeereach.org.au

Launch of Upper Bidgee Reach

During Native Fish Awareness Week last year the official launch of the Upper Murrumbidgee Demonstration reach took place on the riverbank near Tharwa. This site is within the ACT Murrumbidgee River Corridor reserve system which has provided many long-term benefits to the river and the people who use it. The launch attracted regional media including The Canberra Times and 666 ABC Canberra who produced great stories about the initiative. The event was well attended, including members of the ACT Government, Murray-Darling Basin Authority (Native Fish Strategy), NSW DII and many other community members. A great welcome to country was provided by Ngunnawal man Wally Bell and following a number of short speeches the Plan was launched by Sharon Lane from the Dept of Territory & Municipal Services with Faye Steward representing the ACT Chief Minister.

The launch site at the junction of the Gudgenby and Murrumbidgee Rivers was chosen to highlight work being undertaken by the ACT Government who are heavily involved in re-establishing river corridor trees as part of the Million Trees component of the ACT Climate Change Strategy. The theme for Native Fish Awareness Week was 'Fish Need Trees!' and aptly a number of local riverine trees were planted at the site by Outward bound volunteers and other attendees.

Thanks to all attended for a great morning out.



Tree planting and good conversation at the launch of the Upper Bidgee Reach Implementation Plan!
Photo: Mark Jekabsons

Planning Makes 'Perfect'?

Demonstration Reaches are about preserving and enhancing river habitat so that the native fish, as well as the other native fauna and flora can get a 'leg up' advantage over their introduced counterparts. Hopefully the process eventually creates an 'island' of habitat in a 'sea' of less suitable areas, where they can build up numbers in the battle to survive.

As important as sticking snags back in the river and getting river flows right are, we need to make sure it isn't just a haphazard affair. We need a guiding vision and a series of targets to work towards (and be able to measure our progress by). That's why the first year (+) of the Upper Bidgee Reach was spend drafting up a series of plans including: Implementation (the doing bit), Communication & Participation (the getting involved bit), Monitoring & Evaluation (the science bit) and the Carp Reduction Strategy. Now in early 2011 this process is all but wound up.

Although there's no such thing as 'perfect' when it comes to river rehabilitation, this intense planning process will hopefully allow for a structured, more holistic approach that will provide better long-term results for the river and all who enjoy it.

Sand slugs are 'underwater deserts' for fish and other animals such as platypus, filling in deep holes and smothering feeding areas.

Scoping Our River 'Deserts'

'Sand slugs', as they are often referred to, are large deposits of bed load sediment (fine gravel, sand, silt and clay on the floor of the river channel). Within the upper Bidgee they occur in the open valleys where the river slows down after it flows out of the gorges. Because the river velocity slows it no longer has the energy to carry the larger grains of sediment and they settle out, filling in deep holes as well as the small gaps between rocks. This essentially creates an underwater 'desert', devoid of habitat for fish and other larger animals such as platypus, while at the same time smothering hiding places for small bugs that they like to eat.

The Upper Bidgee Reach has commissioned a scoping study to look at how best to manage these 'sand slugs'. It is thought that the annual sediment budget at Tharwa is around 50,000 cubic metres/year, meaning that new material is still being brought in from the upper catchment. The hope is that we will be able to provide a solution that allows fish to be able to better utilise these areas until the problems with the sediment source become more under control.



An underwater 'desert' at Tharwa Sandwash in the ACT. Upper Bidgee Reach hopes to make these sort of areas more accessible for native fish.
Photo: Luke Johnston

Meet the Fishy Family

The Upper Bidgee Reach between Bredbo and Casuarina Sands is home to a group of 7 native fish species, as well as platypus, the Murray River crayfish and a large range of other native aquatic and semi-aquatic species. Of these 3 species are listed as nationally threatened (Murray Cod, Trout Cod & Macquarie Perch). This means that our stretch of river is critical habitat for nationally species recognised as threatened with extinction!

Other fish species that inhabit the Reach include Golden perch, Western carp gudgeon, Australian smelt and the mountain galaxias.

Some of these species are typical of the lowlands and others of areas from higher elevation. Interestingly the upper limit of our lowland species occurs roughly in the centre of the Reach near Angle Crossing. However, like rivers, there are those that don't recognise natural or political boundaries such as the trout cod which can be found throughout.

If you happen to be dangling a line in the Bidgee remember there are species which can't be taken, and there are size and bag limits on the others. We're always keen to hear stories about what's been caught, or from others who may have been by the river and been lucky enough to spy the weird and wonderful platypus in the wild.

Any sightings or records will be appreciated and can be sent to us at info@upperbidgeereach.org.au



Nationally threatened with extinction, the Trout Cod is found in low numbers throughout the Upper Bidgee Reach. Distinguished from its close relative, the Murray Cod by often having a dark line through the eye and an overhanging upper jaw, this species is fully protected and must be returned to any waterway in which it is caught.

Photo ACT Government

Carp, carp everywhere...

As many of us know, carp are now widespread through the Murray-Darling Basin. Our local waterways including the Upper Bidgee Reach are no exception, with up to **80%** of local fisheries research catch comprising carp. A Carp Reduction Strategy has been produced as part of the planning processes for the Upper Bidgee Reach, which sets out a range of options to reduce the impact of carp, including research to better understand their behaviour and distribution, as well as trialling interventions.

The ACT Government recently held a workshop with relevant local experts to discuss ways to manage carp in ACT waterways. A number of options were suggested for carp control in Canberra's urban lakes including lake draw-down during breeding season, using carp attractants to help net fish and also electrofishing. Another workshop will be held in early 2011 to discuss a trial carp reduction project.

A good source of information about carp can be found on the NSW Government website: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fisheries/pests-diseases/freshwater-pests/species/carp/

The local Carp Reduction Strategy is available on the Upper Bidgee Reach website.

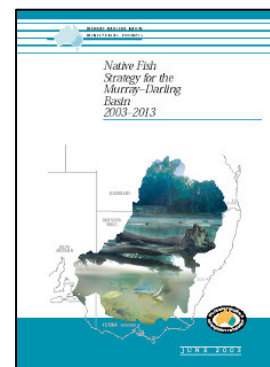
Carp are known to comprise up to 80% of local fisheries catch in local waterways.

The Native Fish Strategy in a local context

The Native Fish Strategy (NFS) for the Murray-Darling Basin has coordinators for each state/territory jurisdiction across the basin. Charlie Carruthers is responsible for coordinating and assisting with fish and fish habitat actions relevant to the NFS across the southern NSW Basin (including the ACT).

Being based locally with NSW Dept of Industry & Investment in Queanbeyan Charlie has been a great supporter and resource in developing the Upper Bidgee Reach and has also undertaken a range of consultation and community activities in the Capital region.

For more info on how the NFS is applicable in the local region you can contact Charlie on 02 6298 0802.



A healthier, more resilient & sustainable river reach and corridor that is appreciated and enjoyed by all communities of the national capital region



UPPER MURRUMBIDGEE DEMONSTRATION REACH

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The Upper Bidgee Reach is a collaborative initiative having received support from 13 partners and a range of community organisations and individuals in its throughout its establishment. Funding has been received through the Caring For Our Country (CFOC) scheme, as well as the Murray-Darling Basin Authority Native Fish Strategy. Co-ordination is currently provided by the Project Manager Luke Johnston who is housed within the ACT Government Dept of Territory & Municipal Services.

A big thanks to all who have supported the Upper Bidgee Reach to date and we look forward to continuing to work with the local community to help bring back the fish in the headwaters of the Murrumbidgee River catchment.

We're on the Web!

www.upperbidgeereach.org.au

So far so good... willow control in the Bumbalong Valley

In 2010 around 5km of willows were removed within the NSW section of the Upper Bidgee Reach at and near Bumbalong using funding from CFOC. Where possible blackberry was also controlled.

We're now looking forward to getting more native vegetation in and growing on the riverbank which will create better instream conditions for the aquatic fauna and flora.

A new study is likely to take place at Bumbalong where willows have been removed to evaluate best management revegetation practices to achieve water quality outcomes.

This study new is being headed by Danielle Baker from ALS Global and will take place over the coming months.



Excavator piling cut willow at Bumbalong Homestead.
Photo: Helen Shimitris