

# THE UPPER BIDGEE REACH



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## UPPER MURRUMBIDGEE DEMONSTRATION REACH

### Fresh 'water news' for the upper Bidgee

Throughout the summer, work continued to develop the Upper Murrumbidgee Demonstration Reach. It was an amazing season and the wettest in 63 years in the capital region. Tharwa, at the centre of our demonstration reach, reportedly had its highest summer rainfall on record. The Murrumbidgee has experienced some greatly needed high volume flows which culminated in the likes of Burrinjuck Dam overtopping by 30,000 megaliters a day. Although water is seemingly in high supply, the fact still remains that the ecological health of the upper Murrumbidgee will continue to suffer from reduced surface flows and altered seasonal flow cycles beyond the current spate of wet weather. This valuable natural resource that is utilised in hydroelectricity generation and for rural and domestic consumption needs to be managed in the best way possible to balance our own and environmental requirements.

The poor state of the upper Murrumbidgee caused by altered hydrology received significant media attention (headlines eluding to a 'man-made drought') following the release of a report by the Snowy Scientific Committee entitled 'The Adequacy of Environmental Flow Releases to the Upper Murrumbidgee River' late last year. The report documents



Burrinjuck Dam overflowing after heavy rain

the reduction in flow volumes delivered to the river downstream of Tantangara Reservoir and the SSC have subsequently made recommendations to improve the situation. Implementation of the recommendations will begin later this year with increased flows to target ecological requirements for recruitment of the endangered Macquarie Perch between Tantagara and Murrells Crossing (upstream of the demo reach). Let's hope we see at least some of the benefits flow on downstream in the demo reach.

Reports and other information can be found by visiting the 'records' area of:

<http://www.snowyssc.org/>



### Upper Bidgee Reach online!

[www.upperbidgeereach.org.au](http://www.upperbidgeereach.org.au)



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- A new report is available detailing the feasibility of various options to improve fish habitat within the Upper Bidgee 'sand slugs'. Read about progress being made towards an outcome.
- Local schools in the Monaro region are now excited about opportunities to get involved in the Upper Bidgee Reach
- Come and learn about why carp are an issue in the basin and have some fun casting a line for a few at the end of May!

## How I met your ‘demo reach’

Across the Murray-Darling Basin, it is estimated that native fish populations are at around 10% of pre-European settlement levels. As such the Murray-Darling Basin Authority established the Native Fish Strategy, which aims to implement multiple management actions to halt the decline and actually bolster populations up to as much as 60% by 2053. Demonstration Reaches are places, guided by the Native Fish Strategy, where the benefit of cumulative management interventions to improve native fish habitat take place. There are now seven active demonstration reaches across the basin, with the Upper Murrumbidgee Demonstration Reach being the newest, and with its establishment there are demo reaches in every state and territory in the basin.

Some of the existing demonstration reaches have been operating for several years, whereas others, like the Upper Bidgee Reach are in the early phases of implementation. To ensure some of the lessons learnt (successes and frustrations) don't need to be learnt again by others, and to bolster awareness and professional relationships among the demonstration reach and greater Native Fish Strategy community, a workshop was recently held that brought key players together including demo reach managers, native fish strategy coordinators, supporting agencies and community members involved in demo reaches. The event kicked off with introductory presentations by each of the demonstration reach practitioners ('How i met your demo reach!') which highlighted the successes and challenges, wins and losses, encountered in each of the reaches - and the commonality to each.

**“An important aspect of natural resource management projects is to become less reliant on short-term government funding cycles”**

Of importance to demonstration reaches is good planning (implementation, community involvement and scientific monitoring and evaluation), actively promoting the concept that we can actually make a difference with such an initiative, raising awareness of our efforts and of course ensuring we attract \$\$ to keep the initiative rolling along. To that end, participants were treated to presentations by experts in communications, alien species management, scientific monitoring and evaluation and corporate stakeholder engagement. The latter, following up on the identified need for NRM projects such as demonstration reaches to become less reliant on short term government funding cycles. To expand upon this concept an open forum is due to be held by Garry Reynolds (Dept Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry) in Canberra on the 1st June 2011 for managers of natural resources. Places are limited.

Connecting existing demonstration reach participants and sharing knowledge was a valuable and worthwhile exercise and the organisers can well and truly be commended for their efforts.

Information regarding the upcoming forum on corporate engagement can be obtained by emailing Garry Reynolds on [garry.reynolds@nrm.gov.au](mailto:garry.reynolds@nrm.gov.au)



**Demonstration Reaches: Planning, Partnership, Investment, Implementation, Education and Participation, Science**

## Update on efforts to improve our river ‘deserts’

The first issue of ‘The Upper Bidgee Reach’ newsletter eluded to the fact that slow flowing sections the Upper Murrumbidgee River are heavily impacted by large ‘sand slugs’. These sand slugs are large deposits of gravel, sand, silt and clay on the channel floor that have come about as a result of large scale catchment erosion and altered flow regimes. These environments are not suitable habitat for native fish, especially upland species adapted to clean, relatively fast flowing rivers and streams often with rocky channels that provide both food supply and shelter.



The Tharwa Sand Slug at the Tharwa Sandwash (Gigerline nature Reserve). This is the ‘tail’ of the slug where sediment first settles out after travelling from upstream in the Monaro.

The first stage of a detailed plan to better manage these underwater deserts in the Upper Bidgee Reach has been completed and is now available in the form of a report entitled ‘Feasibility Study to Address the Ecological Impacts of Sedimentation’. The report, compiled by GHD, provides an analysis of the land, water and sediment storage along the UMDR, details the legislative context that will foreshadow any improvement measures and an evaluation of the best available options to improve fish habitat in the impacted reaches.

**Funding is currently being sought to improve native fish habitat within the Tharwa ‘sand slug’**

Five main impact areas of moderate to high sediment storage are identified within the boundaries of the Upper Bidgee Reach with the worst affected being Tharwa in the ACT. Therefore it was recommended that a strategy be developed to decrease the impact at Tharwa using a combination of channel constriction and scouring techniques to ‘open up native fish habitat and passage’. Many who have approached me have suggested sand extraction, however this was seen as a less favorable option due to a number of risks, as identified in the report.

Following from the suggestions made in the report, a funding application has been made for Caring for our Country Regional Investment through the ACT Natural Resource Management Council to undertake works at Tharwa. Should the project proposal be successful, on-ground works will take place downstream of Tharwa Bridge to emplace paired large woody debris ‘deflectors’ to narrow the channel and enhance sediment scour under a range of flow levels. This would enhance the existing rock groynes in that stretch of river. If proven to improve the habitat, the technique could then be utilised throughout the upper Murrumbidgee.

The report is now available on the Upper Bidgee Reach website at:

[www.upperbidgeereach.org.au/sediment](http://www.upperbidgeereach.org.au/sediment)

## Schools workshop in the Monaro

In early April a school river health workshop was held with a focus on helping local kids in the upper catchment get an understanding of what this project called a ‘demonstration reach’ is in their own back yard! Groups from Michelago, Numeralla and Bredbo Primary schools came together to hear presentations from a range of speakers including Adrian Wells from the Native Fish Strategy Community Stakeholder Taskforce, Charlie Carruthers the southern NSW Native Fish Strategy Coordinator, Matt De Jongh from Murrumbidgee CMA, Luke Johnston the Upper Bidgee Reach coordinator and Tanya Noakes of Upper Murrumbidgee WaterWatch.



Well primed by previous engagement through WaterWatch and the Native Fish Strategy, the kids seemed to absorb the concepts of ‘catchments’, ‘river health’, ‘biodiversity’, ‘habitat’ and river ‘demonstration reaches’. They were treated to an educational game of ‘steal the Murray cod eggs’ and a trip to the river to undertake water quality testing, discuss fish habitat, and help plan what can be done and how they can help improve their own patch of the Upper Bidgee Reach!



A big thanks to the key organisers, especially Antia Brademan at Upper Murrumbidgee WaterWatch and the Charlie from the Native Fish Strategy.

Local schools are now more knowledgeable about the issues facing local fish species in Upper Bidgee Reach



The Upper Bidgee Reach is a collaborative initiative having received support from 13 partners and a range of community organisations and individuals 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. Coordination is currently provided by the Project Manager Luke Johnston from 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.

## **UPPER MURRUMBIDGEE DEMONSTRATION REACH**

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**Visit us online!**

[www.upperbidgeereach.org.au](http://www.upperbidgeereach.org.au)

## **2011 Upper Bidgee Reach - River Carp Muster!**

Registrations are now open for the inaugural Upper Bidgee Reach - River Carp Muster! It's well known across the Murray-Darling Basin that carp dominate what used to be exciting native fisheries. Carp established in the Capital Region in the 1970's and, as generalist species able to tolerate a wide range of environmental variables, they subsequently thrived in the heavily altered and degraded river and lake conditions. They now dominate even the seemingly most pristine areas in the Upper Bidgee catchment, known to have extended their range as far upstream as Adaminaby.

A number of local carp fishing events take place annually both across the basin and locally. This year sees the introduction of the first such event in the Upper Bidgee itself which aims to highlight the issue of carp in the river, and to have some fun in the process! From the author's perspective those river carp put on a good show, especially pitted against light gear! At one location in the ACT near Tuggeranong the Upper Bidgee Reach manager and other company were kept engaged for over 3 hours with rarely a break while winding in the river beasts from just one pool!

Fishing times are from 9:00am to 3:00pm, Sunday 29th May 2011 with presentations and prizes (thanks to our sponsors) at the weigh station at Pont Hut Crossing in Gordon (ACT) to follow. Entry forms and terms of conditions are available on the website at



[www.upperbidgeereach.org.au/CarpMuster](http://www.upperbidgeereach.org.au/CarpMuster)