

22 Wimmera & Avoca River Catchments

Active research into the history of fish populations in the Wimmera and Avoca River Catchments was not conducted in this project; however, some early news accounts describing native fish populations were located. A brief summary of the records located are presented.

22.1 Wimmera River

The earliest newspaper accounts indicate that the largest native fish present in the Wimmera River were Blackfish and eels. In 1864 a flood was reported to have 'destroyed large numbers of blackfish' in the Wimmera River near Ararat (*Argus*, 7 July 1864) and eels and Blackfish were mentioned as present in the river in another article (*Argus*, 4 July 1879). Another account also reports the presence of eels, Blackfish and a small 'native trout' (galaxiids) and a small perch which were probably Pigmy perch:

Some very large eels, caught in Lake Boloke, where they abound were taken into Ararat for sale a few days ago. Two of them, which were in vigorous condition, and over six feet in length, were placed in the municipal water-dam, where possibly they may breed. In some places along the Wimmera the subsidence of the late flood has left scores of blackfish and trout high and dry upon the banks. Amongst these was observed a fish somewhat smaller than the blackfish, though larger than the native trout, which appeared to possess, to the minutest degree, all the characteristics of English perch (*Argus*, 3 October 1867).

In the Mt. William Creek, at Ledcourt, a fish kill occurred, which included large numbers of Blackfish (*Argus*, 21 February 1874). By 1911 it was reported that Blackfish were 'disappearing fast' from the Wimmera River (*Argus*, 15 September 1911).

Cod were introduced to the upper reaches of the Wimmera River near Crowlands in 1861, being sourced from the upper Loddon River (*Argus*, 26 March 1861). After their introduction, few cod were seen for over a decade but in 1870 small cod appeared and were reported to be 'numerous' in the river (*Argus*, 6 June 1866, 14 April 1873). In 1909-10 hundreds of Macquarie perch were released by the Fisheries and Game Department into the upper Wimmera River and in 1910 400 'Murray perch', obtained from the Goulburn Weir, were liberated by local anglers. By that time cod and other Murray River species had a significant presence in the upper reaches near Ararat (*Argus*, 15 September 1911; Cadwallader, 1981). Between 1913 and 1950 large numbers of Macquarie perch were translocated from the Goulburn Weir and Broken River to the Wimmera River (Cadwallader, 1981). In 1933 cod and Golden perch were translocated from the Wakool River to Taylors Lake (NSW Fisheries Report, 1933; Cadwallader, 1981) and a number of translocations of cod from the Gunbower area to Taylors Lake occurred during the mid 1930's (Cadwallader & Gooley, 1984).

In 1950 Langtry recorded Golden perch being present in Lake Hindmarsh and that self-supporting populations of Golden perch and cod existed near Jeparit. Blackfish and Catfish were absent, and Macquarie perch rare in that area. He also highlighted Taylors Lake as one of two impoundments supporting reproducing cod populations (Cadwallader, 1977).

Redfin perch were introduced to Wimmera River in the 1880s (Clements, 1988) and by the early twentieth century were abundant. Near Jeparit a party of 20 anglers on one occasion took 1068 fish for a total of three and a half hundred weight (*Argus*, 28 September 1911). The Wimmera River was used to restock Lake Wendouree with Redfin perch after the population in that water was lost due to drought. Included in the

shipment were small numbers of 'Murray bream' up to 5 lb. (2.3 kg) in weight containing 'spawn' (*Western Mail*, 26 November 1915).

22.2 Avoca River

The earliest newspaper account records that at the time of European settlement the largest fish were Blackfish (*Argus*, 26 February 1873) though it is likely that eels were also present. In the 1860s the Avoca River was considered one of the best Blackfish streams in northern Victoria (*Argus*, 22 January 1915).

In March 1870 '500 Murray cod and trout' were captured by the Murray River Fishing Company near Echuca and transported to the Avoca Acclimatisation Society for release into the Avoca River (*Riverine Herald*, 9 March 1870) indicating that both Murray cod and Trout cod were released. A later account reported that other species were translocated stating that 'cod, perch and bream fry' had been released (*Argus*, 14 April 1873). By 1873 small cod were being taken near Avoca and a Golden perch was taken at Natte Yallock in 1873 (*Argus*, 26 February 1873). Later translocations included nearly 400 Macquarie perch from the Goulburn Weir to the Avoca River in 1927 (Cadwallader, 1981).

Around the time of the initial translocation activity, the Great Flood of 1870 occurred. A newspaper account recorded the arrival of large numbers of 'bream' in the Avoca River which had gained access via Lake Boga:

Simultaneously with the supply of young fish introduced from the Murray to the Avoca River by the local Acclimatisation Society (says the *Mail*), a very remarkable introduction of young bream to the river has taken place. The fish are apparently the genuine Murray bream, and have found their way, most probably, from Lake Boga, during the last winter floods. At Natte Yallock the young fish, about three inches long, are so plentiful that anglers for blackfish are constantly hooking young bream in unorthodox fashion, that is by the hooks when drawn up attaching themselves to their backs or fins (*Argus*, 20 April 1870).

The newspaper evidence indicates that, apart from Blackfish, the larger fish species were absent from the Avoca Catchment at European settlement. The appearance of the 'bream' in 1870 after major flooding indicates that larger species under certain conditions did gain access to and were at least temporarily present in this catchment.

In the 1890s a worm parasite was reported for the first time in the flesh of Blackfish in the Avoca River, and concurrently was also reported in Blackfish at other locations including the Tarwin River and Koo-wee-rup Swamp. A newspaper account suggested that the worm was not endemic to the Avoca Catchment but introduced and speculated that the deterioration of the habitat promoted its occurrence (*Argus*, 22 January 1911). In 1938 a large kill of cod occurred in the Avoca River near Glenloth with the fish ranging from 2 to 80 lb. (0.9 to 36.4 kg) (*Argus*, 2 February 1938). Redfin perch were introduced to the catchment in the 1880s (Clements, 1988) and by 1900 were abundant in the Avoca River (*Argus*, 23 January 1900).