

**River blackfish found during fish monitoring in Yallakool Creek, southern NSW**

Researchers from Charles Sturt University (CSU) and NSW Fisheries have detected river blackfish (*Gadopsis marmoratus*) in Yallakool Creek in the Edward-Wakool river system for the first time since the monitoring of environmental flows commenced in 2010.

The adult river blackfish were caught in March 2018 using a backpack electrofishing unit during a survey undertaken as part of the monitoring of environmental water through the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office's Long-Term Intervention Monitoring (LTIM) project in the Edward-Wakool system.

CSU Technical Officer John Trethewie said "Both adult and larval river blackfish have previously been detected in the nearby upper Wakool River. It was great to see this species turn up in another part of the Edward-Wakool river system".

There are two species of blackfish; river blackfish (northern and southern) and the two-spined blackfish (*G. bispinosus*). Both the northern form of river blackfish and two-spined blackfish are found in the Murray-Darling Basin. The northern form of the river blackfish can grow to 350 mm but is commonly only 200-250 mm. They display a marbled pattern that can vary in colour from olive-green to black. They are commonly called 'slipperies' or 'greasies' by anglers due to their thick mucus coating and fine scales that make them difficult to handle.

River blackfish were once widespread across the Murray-Darling Basin, but have suffered declines in many locations. De-snagging, cold-water pollution and interactions with introduced species are likely causes of the decline.

River blackfish are predominately nocturnal and feed on insect larvae, crustaceans and other smaller fish. They are confined to very small home ranges that they rarely venture from. River blackfish usually spawn inside hollow logs between October and December after water temperatures exceed 16°C. The male will stay with the eggs, fanning them with his fins until they hatch. Once hatched the larvae will remain in the nest for up to three weeks.

Professor Robyn Watts, leader of the Edward-Wakool LTIM project, said "This new observation of river blackfish in Yallakool Creek is great news. Although our surveys had previously not detected them in Yallakool Creek, they may have been there in very low numbers for some time. However, it is possible that the 2016 flood mobilised and relocated individuals from other parts of the system into Yallakool Creek. A trial to deliver continuous base flows during the winter of 2017 may have also helped individuals establish and maintain their home ranges over the winter period."

"Monitoring of environmental flows in the Edward-Wakool system is ongoing and will enable us to follow this population of river blackfish over time" said Prof Watts from CSU's Institute for Land, Water & Society.

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Photo caption: River blackfish caught in Yallakool Creek in March 2018 (Photo: John Trethewie)