

Protecting Silver Perch – a guide for fishers and land managers

A THREATENED SPECIES

Silver Perch (*Bidyanus bidyanus*), also known as Black Bream, is native to the Murray-Darling river system. Historically they were common throughout most of this region, however there has been a significant decline in the distribution and abundance of Silver Perch from most of their former range. Only one remaining secure and self-sustaining population occurs in NSW; in the central Murray River downstream of Yarrowonga weir, as well as several anabranches and tributaries.



Photo: Gunther Schmida

HABITATS

Silver Perch have been found in a wide range of habitats and climates across the Murray-Darling Basin. They are generally found in faster-flowing water including rapids and races and more open sections of river. They can tolerate a wide range of temperatures, from 2 – 38°C, however aquaculture research has shown that the optimal temperature range for the species is 23 – 28°C, with anything outside the range resulting in decreased feeding and growth. Spawning and recruitment success are both considered to be heavily dependent on high flows and overbank flooding.



Photo: R.B.McCormack

DELIBERATELY FISHING FOR SILVER PERCH FROM NATURAL RIVERS AND STREAMS AND UNLISTED DAMS IS ILLEGAL AND SIGNIFICANT PENALTIES APPLY

If you accidentally catch a Silver Perch from natural rivers and streams, you must release it immediately, causing the least possible harm. Penalties can include fines of up to \$55,000 and one year in prison.

While it is illegal for anglers to take Silver Perch from rivers or streams in the Murray-Darling river system, it is legal for anglers who comply with the recreational fishing rules to catch and keep Silver Perch from listed stocked impoundments and private dams. Harvesting Silver Perch from fish farms is also permitted.

Minimum legal length: 25 cm in listed stocked dams.

Bag limit: 5 in listed stocked dams.

Possession limit: 10 in listed stocked dams.

Dams where Silver Perch may be taken include: Pindari, Copeton, Split Rock, Keepit, Chaffey, Glenbawn, Glennies Creek, Windamere, Burrendong, Ben Chifley, Wyangala, Wyangan, Yass, Burrinjuck, Lake Albert, Googong, Blowering, Jounama Pondage.

IDENTIFYING A SILVER PERCH

Silver Perch have been recorded growing to 8 kg in weight and 55 cm in length; however they are more commonly seen at a maximum of 1.5 kg in weight and 30 cm in length.

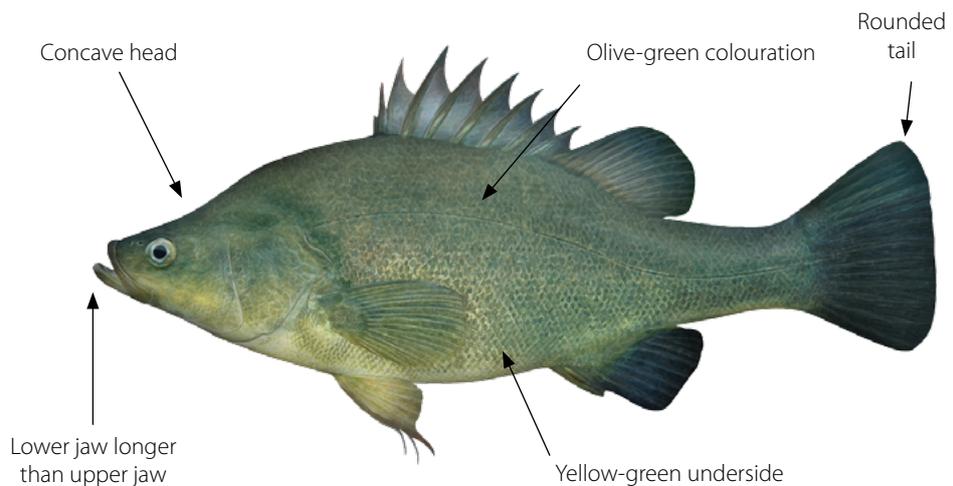
Silver Perch can be mistaken for other similar looking native species such as Golden Perch, so it is important that fishers and land managers can identify each species. Silver Perch are generally dusky bronze, grey or greenish on

the back with silvery-grey sides and a white underside; however the colour of individual fish may vary depending on water quality. They have a forked tail, small beak-like head, small mouth, small scales and jaws of equal length. In contrast, Golden Perch have a rounded tail, an olive green colouration, yellow underside, distinctly concave forehead above their eyes and a lower protruding jaw.

SILVER PERCH

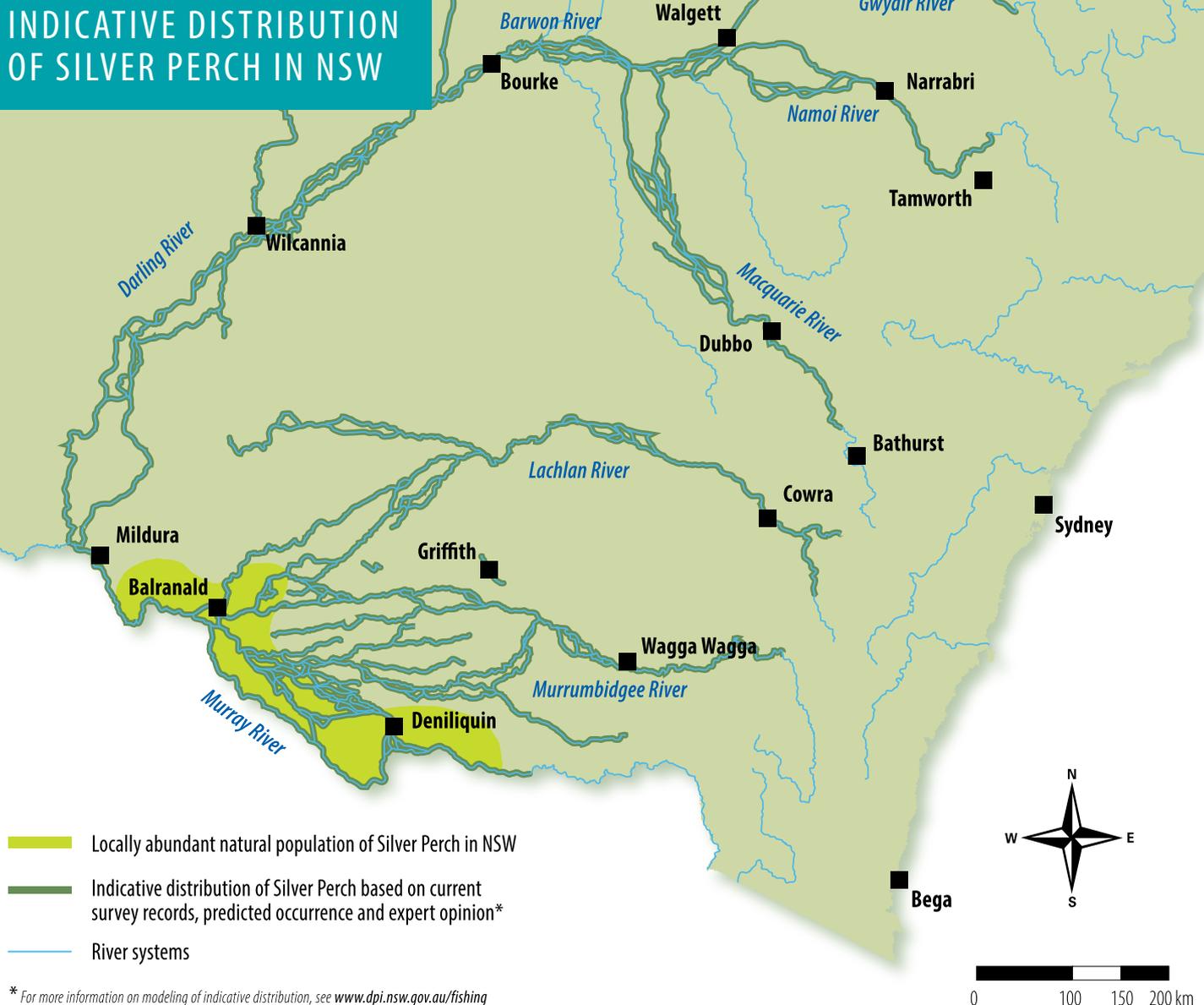


GOLDEN PERCH



Illustrations: Pat Tully

INDICATIVE DISTRIBUTION OF SILVER PERCH IN NSW



WHY IS SILVER PERCH A THREATENED SPECIES?

- » Silver Perch populations have significantly reduced over time due to a range of factors including:
 - » Modification of natural river flows and temperature regimes due to the construction of dams and weirs. Silver Perch prefer faster-flowing waters rather than low velocity, stagnant pools that impoundments create, which lead to disrupted cues for migration and spawning, reduced opportunities for dispersal and limiting food availability;
 - » Removal of riparian vegetation which increases erosion and siltation. Increased salinity and declines in water quality degrade important instream habitat;
- » Loss of submerged macrophyte beds which are important sites for feeding at all life stages;
- » Competition from introduced species such as Carp, Redfin Perch and Gambusia;
- » Susceptibility to Epizootic Haematopoietic Necrosis Virus (EHNV) which is carried by the introduced species Redfin Perch;
- » Stocking of inappropriate genetic strains, domesticated aquaculture stock or Silver Perch hybrids; and
- » Historic overfishing and illegal fishing practices.

ARTIFICIAL BREEDING AND STOCKING

Silver Perch is an important freshwater angling species, and widespread stocking for recreational fisheries has occurred in the Murray-Darling Basin and in some coastal catchments outside its natural range. It is illegal to target or keep Silver Perch from rivers, although it is still permitted to take them from specified impoundments and private dams where populations are created and maintained by stocking. There is also a conservation stocking program for the species that aims to restore populations in areas with suitable habitat where the species has declined or to re-establish populations in areas where degraded habitats have been rehabilitated.

IMPACTS OF ILLEGAL FISHING

Any illegal activity that reduces Silver Perch numbers is considered harmful to the viability of the population and long-term conservation of the species. Targeted or indirect capture of Silver Perch directly reduces their numbers, removes breeding age adults and disturbs breeding activities.



Photo: NSW DPI Image Library

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

A recovery plan has been prepared for Silver Perch that sets out the actions required to recover the species to a position of viability in nature. The overall objective of the recovery plan is to prevent the extinction and ensure the recovery of Silver Perch populations in NSW.

The independent Fisheries Scientific Committee is responsible for listing threatened species of fish and marine vegetation and for reviewing scientific

information to assess whether a species should be downgraded or de-listed from the NSW *Fisheries Management Act 1994*. The Committee assesses the eligibility of each species for listing against criteria set out in the Fisheries Management (General) Regulation 2010. Silver Perch will be de-listed when they cease to be eligible for listing as a threatened species in accordance with the criteria set out in the regulations.

HANDY FISHING TIPS

Silver Perch is a listed threatened species and deliberately fishing for them from waters other than listed impoundments is illegal. However when fishing for other species in waters within the natural range of Silver Perch, please consider the following tips to maximise the survival of any inadvertently caught Silver Perch.

- » Use methods and rigs that reduce deep hooking – fish for your target species with artificial lures or flies, and use non-offset circle hooks when using bait.
- » If the fish is hooked deeply, cut the line as close as possible to the fish's mouth. Do not try to remove the hook.
- » Use barbless hooks or hooks with reduced bards to make removal easier and minimise damage.
- » Avoid lifting the fish from the water – if possible unhook the fish while it is still in the water. Try to retrieve hooks from mouth-hooked fish and release the fish as quickly as possible.
- » Support the weight of the fish properly. Use wet hands or wet gloves when handling fish to minimise damage to their skin. Don't hold the fish by the gills or eyes.
- » Use knotless mesh landing nets – avoid knotted landing nets which may damage the fish's scales, skin, eyes and fins.
- » Use only legal fishing gear – the use of gaff hooks, spears, spear guns or similar devices is prohibited in any freshwater environment.
- » If you find that you are catching Silver Perch or other threatened and protected species, you should consider trying to avoid hooking them by changing your location, baits or fishing rigs.

FIVE THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP

1. Take a moment to study this guide and familiarise yourself with the appearance of Silver Perch.
2. If you catch a Silver Perch from waters other than listed stocked impoundments release it carefully causing the least possible harm.
3. If you live on or manage land adjacent to Silver Perch habitat, prevent stock from directly accessing waterways, manage and protect vegetation on river banks, revegetate degraded riparian areas and prevent erosion. Become involved in habitat restoration or other programs that improve habitat for native fish.
4. Report illegal or suspect fishing activities by:
 - » Contacting your nearest Fisheries Office
 - » Using the Fishers Watch Phone line 1800 043 536; or
 - » Completing the online report from: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/compliance/report-illegal-activity
5. Participate in the NSW DPI Threatened Species Sighting Program. If you catch or see a Silver Perch, take a photo, record the details and send the information to the NSW DPI Threatened Species Section by emailing: fisheries.threatenedspecies@dpi.nsw.gov.au or completing the online report form: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/species-protection/report-it

WHAT IF YOU ARE NOT SURE?

If you catch a Silver Perch or if you are unsure, release the fish back to the water with minimal harm. Significant penalties apply for buying, selling, possessing or harming threatened or protected species in NSW without the appropriate approvals. Special rules apply for Silver Perch in listed stocked impoundments.



Photo: NSW DPI Image Library

FOR MORE INFORMATION

NSW DPI has a number of publications available on Silver Perch. The publications are available on-line at the NSW DPI website: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au

Alternatively email the NSW DPI Threatened Species Unit at: fisheries.threatenedspecies@dpi.nsw.gov.au

Fishing regulations may change during the life of this publication. It is the responsibility of fishers to ensure they are acting within the law at all times.

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (March 2018). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of the Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.

Published by the Department of Primary Industries.