

NSW Native Fish Drought Response: Fish Rescues and Relocations

TO REPORT A FISH DEATH OR OBSERVATION, PLEASE CALL THE FISHERS WATCH HOTLINE ON 1800 043 536

The NSW Department of Primary Industries has ongoing concerns for further fish deaths as dry and very low flow conditions persist across most of the NSW Murray-Darling Basin (MDB). As drought conditions continue, it is likely that a range of responses - including fish rescues and relocations - will need to be considered in order to protect native fish stocks.

Native fish species, such as the iconic Murray Cod and Golden Perch, provide a strong social and cultural connection for communities of the NSW MDB.

Additionally, there are a number of threatened native fish across the state, as well as fish populations that are key to the long-term maintenance and recovery of fish communities both locally, regionally and across the entire Murray-Darling Basin.

NSW DPI will use the best available knowledge from experts and communities to identify priority locations when assessing and planning rescue and relocation activities.

Response options:

Given the additional pressure fish rescue and relocation activities can place on already stressed fish and river systems, all potential feasible alternative drought response actions will be explored before planning to rescue and relocate fish. This includes, but is not limited to:

- » Watering strategies (working with river operators, water management agencies and water users to maximise the use of water where possible across NSW);
 - » A range of technological interventions to improve water quality (e.g. mixing, oxygenation);
 - » Increased monitoring and surveillance activities.

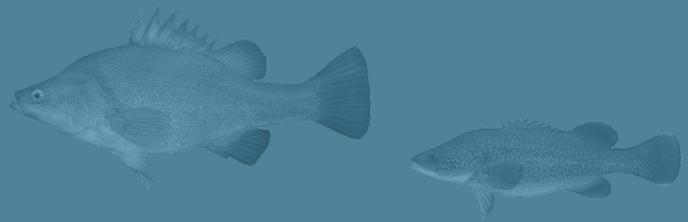
Why now?

NSW DPI acknowledges that the extreme nature of the current drought conditions requires unique responses to maintain native fish populations in NSW. A lack of inflows across most of NSW has seen waterways continue to dry and disconnect, with the current forecast for ongoing dry conditions placing extra pressure on remaining pools.

Who can undertake a fish rescue?

Endorsed rescue actions must be appropriately planned for and covered under an appropriate Permit and meet relevant legislation under the *NSW Fisheries Management Act 1994* and the *NSW Biosecurity Act 2015*.





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Permits approved by the Deputy Director General DPI Fisheries will allow permit holders, and any additional people listed, to collect native fish species (including threatened species) in emergency situations to protect their welfare, possess and transport rescued individuals, and release rescued native fish species to a secure waterway or location following consultation with DPI Fisheries and DPI Biosecurity on a case by case basis.

Where will rescued fish go?

All rescue and relocation actions will need to consider the availability and capacity of suitable places to put fish. This should include information about the volume of water, the quality of water, and habitat condition of new areas. Ideally a new home will be found close to the same water source or catchment; however this might not always be possible. Given this, alternative habitat for rescued fish may also include artificial dams within the same catchment, or suitable hatchery facilities that have the capacity to maintain rescued native fish.

Can recreational fishers be involved in fish rescues?

DPI is developing a set of protocols to enable fishing clubs and other relevant organisations to work with us on native fish rescues and relocations. Full details of how fishers and clubs can get involved with DPI on this important work will be made widely available as soon as possible.

While this development work is taking place, NSW DPI encourages recreational fishers to report any issues and to avoid taking direct action as it may do more harm than good if not properly organised, controlled and managed.

NSW DPI looks forward to working with the NSW recreational fishing community to help our iconic native fish during this unprecedented drought crisis.

Why are some native species being rescued and not others?

A variety of NSW government agencies are working to identify key areas and species that are in critical condition. Unfortunately, this means that not every single fish will be relocated. Some species, such as Murray Cod can live up to 40-50 years. As they take longer to reach maturity and breeding age, it is important to do everything we can to relocate as many Murray Cod as possible to better river conditions and hatcheries where they can be kept to use as broodstock when conditions improve.

Additionally, Murray Cod are an iconic native sportfish with significant socio-economic importance, especially to regional NSW where recreational fishing is a key tourism and economic driver.

Other more common native fish species such as Bony Herring, which are an important part of the food chain, are able to reproduce earlier and potentially in larger numbers, helping them to recover quicker when conditions improve.

