



Save the Murray

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Carp



Carp are one of the introduced or 'alien' fish species that are found in the Murray-Darling Basin. They are some times referred to as European Carp but they actually come from Central Asia. The scientific name for carp is *Cyprinus carpio*. Carp can be identified by the two whiskers on either corner of their upper lip. They can grow as large as 17kg and are long lived, prolific breeders. Since their introduction, carp have become the most common fish in the Murray Darling Basin's rivers and wetlands.

What is the problem with carp?

Carp numbers are now estimated to be between 70 per cent and over 90 percent of fish biomass in the rivers of the Murray-Darling Basin. Carp have been declared a pest fish in most Australian states.

Since carp were first introduced in Australia, our river systems have suffered massive changes. Changing natural flows have impacted on native fish, while farming practices, industry and urban development have contributed pollution to our waterways. These activities have created an ideal environment for carp while at the same time disadvantaging our native fish.

Carp are blamed for many problems in our river systems including the decline in native fish populations and the degradation of habitats. While carp may have some impact on these issues, it is more likely that the significant changes to our river systems such as river regulation, urban development and farming coincided with the introduction of carp to compound the problem. The main problem with carp is simply that they do not belong in the Murray-Darling Basin.

Carp are prolific breeders; female carp can produce over one million eggs per kilogram of body weight and spawn several times a year. Carp are extremely hardy and adaptable to their environment. They can tolerate a wide range of temperature, oxygen and salinity levels, allowing them to survive in water of poor quality where native fish would die. The decline in native fish populations and the rise in introduced fish such as carp is a big problem for our riverine ecosystems.

Where do carp come from?

Carp are native to Central Asia and were introduced to Australia in the 1850's. It was not until almost 100 years later in the 1960's that carp became a problem in our river systems. A few illegally imported carp escaped into the Murray River and spread rapidly. They are now the most common fish found in the Murray-Darling Basin.

What impacts do carp have on native fish and the river?

Carp do not have teeth to catch and eat other fish; however they do compete with young native fish for food in the form of zooplankton.

Carp compete with some native fish for spawning sites. When in large numbers, carp can increase the turbidity (murkiness) of the water through their bottom feeding habits. The presence of carp can increase erosion of stream banks, channels and levees by undermining them, causing them to slump.



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Carp Continued

Carp can infect native fish with the anchor worm (a parasite) which can prevent spawning and can be fatal for large adult Murray Cod and Golden Perch.

Can we use carp?

Commercial fishers have continually fished carp since 1970. Carp is already processed into fertilizer, fish bait, stock feed, burley, fish seasoning, as well as fresh fish for restaurants. Some fresh and processed carp is even exported overseas.

How can carp be controlled?

Controlling carp involves a combination of improving river management, using chemicals and genetic manipulation. Efforts to improve river management are already in place in many areas. They include the work of fish, land and water agencies, the Murray Darling Association, Landcare, Catchment Management organizations, Local Government, the National Carp and Pest Fish Taskforce, community groups, researchers and the Murray-Darling Basin Commission. New procedures are being developed for improving water allocations to balance the needs of human consumption with those of the environment, including native fish. Combined with other integrated management techniques, they can achieve a great deal in managing and eventually controlling carp.

Why don't we poison carp or kill them with a virus?

A virus is not an option because it may affect native fish and impact on Australia's 'clean-green' food production status. Carp can be poisoned but the widespread distribution of carp in Australia limits the use of poison to special cases, such as enclosed water bodies and lakes.

What can I do?

Anglers can assist by complying with regulations that require non-native fish are not to be returned to the water once captured. Furthermore, anglers and the broader community should be aware that the translocation of fish between waters is a serious and in some cases, illegal activity that can lead to the establishment of pest populations. This activity should not be undertaken without the proper information and authorisation.

Remember these main rules!

- Do not use live carp as bait

Using any live fish for bait is inhumane. Using carp, which may escape and establish, could mean you will be catching nothing but carp in your favourite fishing hole in a few years!

- Avoid the spread of carp eggs

Ensure your boat/trailer and other equipment is free of weeds and other material before moving to a new area.

- Do not release unwanted aquarium fish into water ways

Unwanted fish, particularly goldfish that are related to carp, can become a nuisance in our natural environment

- It is **ILLEGAL** to return carp to the water once you have caught them.