

Threatened Fishes Committee Report - July 2002

By David Crook and John Pogonoski

The threatened fish committee meets each year at the annual ASFB conference to discuss issues relating to threatened fish conservation and to consider nominations for the listing of species on the ASFB threatened fishes list. The updated list of threatened fishes is published each year in the end of year issue of the newsletter. This year, the committee will meet at the annual conference in Cairns in August. Please contact David Crook or John Pogonoski to nominate a species for listing or to add agenda items for discussion at the Cairns meeting. All are welcome at the meeting.

Threatened Fish News

Species Impact Statement on Fishing for the lower Murray Ecological Community in NSW

Following the listing of the aquatic ecological community of the lower Murray River as Endangered under the NSW Fisheries Management Act (1994), a Species Impact Statement (SIS) has recently been released to assess the impact of recreational and commercial fishing. The lower Murray ecological community includes all native fish and aquatic invertebrate species found in natural waterways of the regulated portions of the Murray River below Hume weir, the Murrumbidgee River below Burrinjuck Dam, the Tumut River below Blowering Dam and all associated tributaries. In an attempt to ensure that the ecological community does not suffer any significant long-term impact from fishing activities, the SIS recommends several changes to regulatory controls, including the banning of set lines, a zero bag limit for freshwater catfish and river blackfish, and changes to the size and bag limits for Murray crayfish. The SIS also recommends a review of the biological evidence for minimum and maximum size limits for Murray cod and the preparation of a recovery plan for the ecological community. NSW Fisheries is calling for written submissions regarding the SIS and the Order to allow the continuation of fishing in the lower Murray River catchment (see www.fisheries.nsw.gov.au).

Draft Recovery Plan for Grey Nurse Shark Released

The grey nurse shark (*Carcharias taurus*) is listed as Endangered under the NSW Fisheries Management Act (1994) and in the ASFB list of threatened fishes. In accordance with the requirements of the Fisheries Management Act, NSW Fisheries has recently completed a draft Recovery Plan for the grey nurse shark. The recovery plan identifies commercial and recreational fishing, shark finning and beach meshing as major threats to the species, and outlines actions

aimed at reducing the impacts of these activities. A central recommendation of the recovery plan is the identification of 13 key “aggregation sites” in which grey nurse sharks would be protected under the critical habitat provisions of the Fisheries Management Act. NSW Fisheries are calling for public comment on the Recovery Plan and copies of the plan and the critical habitat identifications are available from the NSW Fisheries website (www.fisheries.nsw.gov.au).

Threatened Fish Overviews Published

The Conservation Overview and Action Plan for Australian Threatened and Potentially Threatened Marine and Estuarine Fishes by John Pogonoski, Dave Pollard and John Paxton was published on the Environment Australia website in February 2002. This conservation overview and action plan reviews 114 of the approximately 4,100 species of Australian marine and estuarine fishes and will provide the impetus for more research into threatened Australian marine and estuarine fishes in the future. The plan highlights the main conservation concerns for some of the marine and estuarine fish species in Australian waters and attempts to address the main problems affecting some of the more threatened and potentially threatened species. This publication is available free of charge at:

<http://www.ea.gov.au/coasts/species/marine-fish/index.html>

Limited copies of CD-Roms are also available by contacting John Pogonoski at the Australian Museum (contact details at end of Threatened Fishes News).

Another publication of interest to those working with freshwater fishes, *Threatened and Potentially Threatened Freshwater Fishes of Coastal New South Wales and the Murray-Darling Basin* by Shaun Morris, Dave Pollard, Peter Gehrke and John Pogonoski was also recently published. For information on obtaining a hard copy, contact Dave Pollard at NSW Fisheries (contact details at end of Threatened Fish News). Special thanks from the authors go to the many ASFB members who attended workshops, provided information, and commented on the draft manuscripts of the abovementioned publications, all of which improved their quality.

Bad News for Threatened Fish in Tasmania

Galaxias conservation work suffered a major setback late last year, when it was discovered that domestic-strain rainbow trout had been illegally introduced to a lagoon containing the endangered Clarence galaxias (*G. johnstoni*), Johnsons Lagoon in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. This species survives only in trout-free waters, and only seven populations remain. Although several populations are protected from trout invasion by natural barriers, they remain at risk from illegal introductions despite efforts to increase public awareness of the devastating effects of such introductions. Fortunately, the trout in Johnsons Lagoon are still immature, so every effort is being made by the Inland Fisheries Service (IFS) to remove them, prevent them spawning by placing a screen in the lagoon inflow and inform visitors of the risks of illegal introductions with signage. Work will continue until the trout have been eradicated, and the site will be subject to ongoing monitoring and management for the conservation of Clarence galaxias.

In other bad news for Tassie's native fish, *Gambusia holbrooki* (commonly known as "mosquitofish") were discovered in July 2001 in the Tamar River in northern Tasmania. The fish were discovered during routine water quality monitoring for Launceston Waterwatch and the IFS is currently in the process of determining the extent of the infestation. The fish are likely to have escaped from a nearby farm dam from where they were reported in 1993. The IFS poisoned the dam soon after the original discovery of *Gambusia* and subsequent surveys suggested that this eradication strategy had been successful. Unfortunately, it now appears that some fish escaped prior to the poisoning and that these fish have established a population in the Tamar River. Given the negative impact of *Gambusia* on native fish in other parts of Australia and throughout the world, this development is a real concern for Tasmania's unique native fish fauna.

[First record of Southern Pygmy Perch from the Lachlan River drainage in NSW](#)

Whilst carrying out a brief survey for river blackfish just north of the ACT border, Mark Lintermans and Brendan Ebner (Environment ACT) captured several individuals of the southern pygmy perch (*Nannoperca australis*). The species was collected at two sites, both on a small tributary of the Lachlan River near Dalton. Other fish species present were northern river blackfish (*Gadopsis marmoratus*), flathead gudgeon (*Phyllipnodon grandiceps*), mountain galaxias (*Galaxias olidus*), and an unidentified carp gudgeon (*Hypseleotris* sp). No *Gambusia* were present at either of the sites, but carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) were observed approximately 100m below the most downstream site. Ten Pygmy Perch were sampled at one site and seven at the second site, with approximately 50 metres of stream electrofished at each site. Pygmy Perch were collected from weedy backwaters and rocky, shallow habitats, classic habitat for the species. Further follow-up surveys are planned for later this year.

[Survey of Northern Territory Freshwater Elasmobranchs](#)

The first NHT-funded survey of Northern Territory freshwater elasmobranchs is about to get off the ground. Dean Thorburn, a PhD student from Murdoch University will begin a survey of the wild rivers of Arnhem Land and will be joined by Conservation Volunteers Australia and traditional owners of the Arnhem Land regions. Also involved in the survey program are Andrew Storey (University of Western Australia) and Peter Last and John Stevens (CSIRO, Hobart). The survey will be undertaken in three "legs" - Arnhem Land, Gulf of Carpentaria and Victoria-Daly regions. The aims of the survey program are to determine the distributions and get baseline data on the Northern Territory's two species of spartooth sharks (*Glyphis species A and C*), the estuarine/freshwater whiprays (*Himantura* sp.) and freshwater/estuarine sawfish (*Pristis microdon* and *P. clavata*).

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