

CLEARER WATERS ALLIANCE MEDIA RELEASE EMBARGOED UNTIL 12.01am 06/04/16



Carp herpes virus first step in native fish recovery says Alliance

The Australian, state and territories governments are considering the release of a carp-specific herpes virus to knock down Australia's worst freshwater pest, the European Carp, but it could be a wasted opportunity unless it is supported by river recovery actions.

An alliance between recreational fishers, irrigators, farmers and environment groups agrees that action on carp is needed but is calling on the government to back up the release of the virus with a range of other measures to maximise outcomes for native fish and our waterways.

Australian Recreational Fishing Foundation Managing Director, Allan Hansard, said that carp have had a devastating effect on native fish populations.

"Historical records show recreational fishers used to catch around 18-22 kilos of native fish in a single hour of fishing around Echuca in the 1920s - now you would be lucky to catch that in a week.

"Releasing this virus is a very important step in aiding native fish to recover, however we need multiple management approaches, such as restocking programs to bring native fish back to these rivers once conditions are right," Mr Hansard said.

National Irrigators' Council CEO, Tom Chesson, said reports in from NIC Members over the Easter long weekend of fishing were mixed. Whilst there was some handy fish caught, carp continued to dominate.

Our collective efforts to improve the health of the Murray Darling Basin and inland fisheries must be about outcomes. The release of the carp herpes virus will provide us with a window of opportunity to implement an integrated program of measures for the control of Carp, which maximise native fish outcomes. It is really a no-brainer," Mr Chesson said.

The Alliance is also asking for a long-term program to make sure native fish have the right conditions to thrive once the virus reduces carp numbers.

Healthy Ecosystems Program Manager at the Australian Conservation Foundation, Jonathan La Nauze, said scientists call European carp 'ecosystem engineers' for a good reason.

"After they invade a river they drastically change it; destroying plants, turning over the river bed, eroding the banks, and muddying the water.

"Carp leave rivers highly degraded and often quite unsuitable for many native fish, so some rivers will need habitat rehabilitation if we want to see good native fish recovery.

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invasive
species council



National Farmers'
FEDERATION



National
Irrigators'
Council

“This is going to involve things like replanting river edges, adding logs and working with farmers to manage stock so stream banks can recover. These techniques have been proven to help native fish populations improve,” Mr La Nauze said.

Invasive Species Council CEO, Andrew Cox, reiterated the level of cooperation needed to achieve results with such a wide spread and long-term program.

“Successful outcomes will need significant investment and cooperation from federal, state and local governments, as well as active participation of catchment management bodies, community groups and members of the public.

“We know Australians want cleaner, healthier rivers. Controlling carp is the first step.

“We need to seize the opportunity of the carp virus release and commit to a long term program to help rivers and native fish communities recover.

“This will be good for native fish and everyone who depends on healthy rivers,” Mr Cox said.

The Clearer Waters Alliance partners are the National Irrigators' Council, the Australian Recreational Fishing Foundation, the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Invasive Species Council and the National Farmers' Federation.

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Note for journalists:

Images of Carp and Native Fish are available at:

www.dropbox.com/sh/jnppf3r74fezw7q/AAA2QC_rU_cZhKTgRdAuX4wMa?dl=0

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