

# alive and kicking

Researchers, managers & anglers working together to secure a bright future for the Murray Cod.

Article by....

Anyone who has ever caught a Murray cod immediately understands how this species earned its iconic status... Fishing journalists have filled pages describing their marbled golden/green skin, deep brown comprehending eyes, and mouth like a giant, lure-munching rat trap. Their witching-hour surface strikes can make a grown man's knees buckle. And let's not forget that they grow to the size of a small minivan. This fish, and the places you need to go to find it, are uniquely and distinctly Australian.

We all know that the home of this great sportsfish, the Murray Darling Basin is doing it tough. Somewhat surprisingly in many areas of the Basin cod have prospered through the drought and over the last decade fishers have reported "best fishing ever". Significant changes to fishing rules, the cessation of commercial fishing, stocking programs and a huge shift in anglers attitudes towards custodianship of a great sports fishery has meant that in many areas catching a big greenfish is a reasonable expectation. The Murray cod recreational fishery is now worth hundreds of millions of dollars and is a vital part of the social and economic culture of the Basin.

Unfortunately, in other areas this Australian icon is doing it tough and there is still a lot of work to do and knowledge to gain before we can rest easy about the future of Murray cod. Disruption of migration, habitat degradation, and historical overfishing are key issues which have impacted on Murray cod. Any freshwater angler who has lobbed a lure at a stump in the Murray will tell you that cod love snags (large woody debris) as habitat.



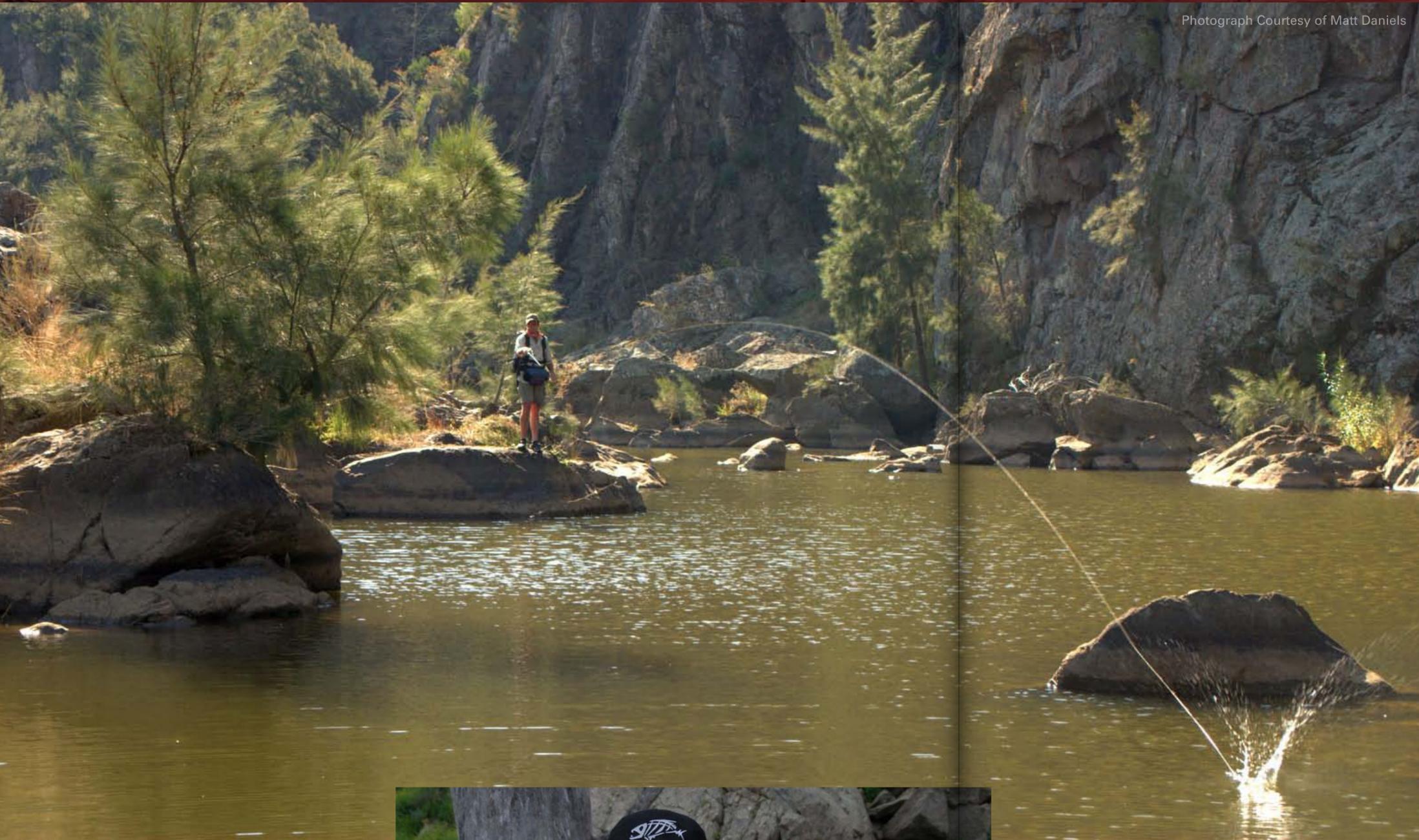
Photograph Courtesy of Anthony Forster



Photograph Courtesy of Matt Daniels

However unfortunately in days gone by many of our rivers were relatively denuded of this sort of structure; it is estimated that over one million snags were removed from the Murray-Darling Basin before we knew any better to improve boat navigation and increase water flow.

Other more recent events are also seriously impacting on Murray cod populations, and fish communities as a whole. Hypoxic blackwater events which affected much of the southern Murray-Darling Basin during 2010/11 have had a devastating impact on our native fish communities from which they will take many years to recover.



Photograph Courtesy of Matt Daniels

The need was also identified for a multi-jurisdictional group to make these actions happen.

And so the Murray Cod Fishery Management Group (MCFMG) was formed.

The Murray Cod Fishery Management Group (MCFMG) is made up of researchers, managers, anglers and government representatives from each jurisdiction within the Murray-Darling Basin, and has the support of the Australian Fisheries Management Forum (AFMF is made up of heads/CEOs of the Australian and state and territory government agencies responsible for fisheries). The primary focus of this group is to enhance Murray cod recreational fisheries outcomes across the Murray-Darling Basin, through coordinated research which aligns with management needs.

The first meeting of the group was held recently in Sydney, and one of the first tasks for the MCFMG will be to prioritise research needs within the Action Plan, and work with researchers and funding bodies to ensure that urgent research needs are addressed.

Speaking at the meeting the Chair of the group, Mr Peter Turnell, explained "This is an important point in time for the future of Murray cod in the Murray-Darling Basin. The broad representation and expertise offered by the members of this group, coupled with the support of AFMF, will help to ensure that future management of this important species is complimentary across jurisdictions, effective in enhancing fisheries outcomes, and based on the best science available"

For more information on this group or for a copy of the Murray Cod Fishery Management Group's Action Plan, please contact the Executive Office, Matt Barwick. Email: [matt.barwick@recfishingresearch.org](mailto:matt.barwick@recfishingresearch.org)



Photograph Courtesy of Anthony Forster



Photograph Courtesy of Matt Daniels

Recognising the need to take decisive action for the management of this important species, a workshop was held in 2010 with funding through the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) and NSW and Victorian governments to develop a strategy for building a stronger recreational Murray cod fishery. Participants of the workshop (of whom roughly one third were anglers) helped to develop an action plan to improve Murray cod recreational fisheries across the Murray-Darling Basin. The importance of building strong partnerships between fisheries, resource management agencies and recreational fishers was identified in order for this to be successful.

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