

MEDIA RELEASE

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Fish on the move at Koondrook weir

Thousands of native fish will be able to freely move between the River Murray and the rich habitat of Gunbower Creek due to a funding boost from the autumn sale of water for the environment.

The Koondrook fishway will provide passage to native fish such as the iconic vulnerable Murray cod and threatened golden perch from the river into the creek for the first time in more than a century.

Key partners including the Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH), North Central Catchment Management Authority (CMA), the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and Goulburn Murray Water have agreed to take the proposed Koondrook fishway into a detailed design and costing phase, and then through to construction.

Fish studies have shown that large numbers of native fish accumulate at Koondrook Weir trying to access the creek, but they cannot get past the weir.

“A fishway will dramatically improve connectivity for fish movement and migration and help boost native fish numbers in the creek,” North Central CMA CEO Brad Drust said.

“It will also add significant value to the fantastic wins we are already seeing with environmental flows and native fish recovery – such as Murray cod spawning in the Gunbower Creek and the critical fish food provided by flows through the Gunbower Forest.”

The Victorian Environmental Water Holder has committed proceeds from a recent sale of 10,000 ML of its 2018-19 water allocation for the environment into construction of the new fishway.

“The Victorian Environmental Water Holder holds, manages and uses Victoria’s environmental water entitlements to protect the health of the rivers, waterways and landscapes that people love and use.” VEWB Chair Denis Flett said.

“As part of managing these entitlements, the VEWB sometimes sells small volumes of water allocation and invests the revenue in projects to support outcomes for the environment, including helping our native fish populations.

“The Koondrook fishway is an example of how we can sell unused water for the environment and use the revenue generated to boost native fish populations through investing in infrastructure.”

The detailed design is currently underway with a focus on ensuring the fishway is able to pass a wide range of species, both large and small, under a range of flow conditions. The design aims to ensure the most ecological benefit to the native fish population, whilst not impacting on the delivery of water to irrigators.

“Through the detailed design process, we will ensure that the solution works for everyone, including Torrumbarry irrigators that rely on the irrigation delivery system for their livelihood.” Denis said.

Victorian Fisheries Authority CEO Travis Dowling said the Koondrook fishway would provide a significant boost to native fish at Gunbower, and in turn, to tourism and recreation in the area.

“Enabling fish to move between Gunbower Creek and the Murray is a key to helping realise the vision of creating a world-class Murray cod fishery in north central Victoria, and in turn will lure recreational anglers from all over to try their luck hooking a big one and, in the process, the region will get a massive boost of tourist dollars.”

Victorian fishing peak body chairman Rob Loats said VRFish had worked closely with North Central CMA on the Native Fish Recovery Plan for Gunbower and the Lower Loddon, which earmarked a fishway at Koondrook weir.

“The Koondrook fishway will be a magnificent project to restore native fish numbers at Gunbower,” Mr Loats said.

“Recreational anglers see first-hand the benefits of sustainable, fishing and improved fish habitats, and this fishway will open up Gunbower Creek to thousands of fish looking to move upstream there.”

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Fast Facts:

- Gunbower Forest is a large, flood-dependent forest between Torrumbarry and Koondrook on the Mid Murray Floodplain, with the River Murray to the north, and Gunbower Creek to the south. It has a range of important environmental values, and forms part of the Living Murray Gunbower-Koondrook-Pericoota icon site.
- Water for the environment has been used at Gunbower Forest to allow large bodied fish, including Murray cod, to migrate, spawn, feed and breed. Since implementing environmental flows in 2011, the native fish population has steadily increased.
- The North Central CMA Native Fish Recovery Plan has identified Koondrook weir as a major barrier for fish species that need to move long distances to spawn, including golden and silver perch.
- Before 2014, there were no young-of-year Murray cod recorded in Gunbower Creek. A water for the environment program began that year, and young-of-year cod have been picked up in surveys every year since.

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