

7 May 2008

NGEMBA, MURUWARI, KAMILAROI AND BARRANBINYA PEOPLE WELCOME RESNAGGING PROGRAM

Aboriginal people from the Bourke and Brewarrina areas have welcomed a resnagging program aimed at improving fish habitat in the Barwon-Darling River between Brewarrina and Bourke, which was launched in Bourke yesterday (6 May 2008).

The Western Catchment Management Authority worked in collaboration with the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) to reintroduce at least 204 large woody habitats, or snags, across 11 sites.

Phil Sullivan, a Ngemba traditional owner, provided the Welcome to Country at the launch. He said the program held a special significance to him as his totem is the yellowbelly, one of the many native fish that will benefit from the reintroduction of the snags.

Mr Sullivan said that while there are many different types of fish in the river, they all swim forward and are physically incapable of swimming in reverse.

"No matter who you are or where you come from: whether you're a Ngemba, Muruwari, Kamilaroi and Barranbinya person, a landholder or a government person, we all need to go forward together," Mr Sullivan said

"We may all be different and we all have our own responsibilities, but we have a common goal and that's looking after the River, so I'm glad that we've all been able to work together on this resnagging project," he said.

Ms Jenny Barker represented the Brewarrina Community Working Party at the launch, while Mr Barry Edwards represented the Bourke Community Working Party. The launch was attended by approximately 40 community members including NSW and local government staff and landholders whose properties have river frontage with resnagging sites. The project was officially launched by one of those landholders, John Gordon of West Mooculta Station.

The project will help with the recovery of endangered or vulnerable fish populations including the silver perch and western populations of olive perchlet and purple-spotted gudgeon, plus the river snail.

NSW DPI Project Manager, David Cordina, said the program would demonstrate how this type of intervention could greatly benefit native fish populations.

"Snags are the inland river equivalent of marine reefs. They are essential for the completion of lifecycles in many species of native fish and provide refuge and shelter, feeding and spawning sites."

The Barwon-Darling River, once an important trade route for river boats, had thousands of tonnes of snags removed for ease of navigation and for fuel for paddle-steamers.



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"The reintroduced snags, sourced from approved clearing works, provide an alternative use for cleared timber while achieving ecological benefits," he said.

The DPI assessed the recreational use of the River and held public meetings to allow people to provide input about the snags' locations.

"Signs at main boat ramps will indicate the resnagging sites and where possible, we have built on existing snags to minimise the impact on boat operators and waterskiiers. People wanting more information on their locations should contact the DPI. Obviously, boat operators are advised to exercise caution as always when travelling at speed on inland rivers," Mr Cordina said.

John Gordon and his brother Andrew and father Merv farmed landholdings along the Darling River around Bourke since the 1970s. They have a resnagging site located in the river adjacent to West Mooculta and are supportive of the project.

"It has to be a plus," Mr John Gordon said.

"If you increase the habitat then it should lead to an increase in native fish populations," he said.

The Gordons are anglers who have witnessed a decline in native fish numbers over the past forty years.

"We've definitely seen a decline in native fish such as yellow belly, catfish and cod and an increase in carp and the associated problems they bring by destroying native fish habitat and river vegetation and degrading the riverbank.

"Putting the snags back into the river will give the native fish a leg up and hopefully result in some flow on effects for the health of the river as well," Mr Gordon said.

The majority of snags were donated by landholders in the Western and Central Western Catchments of NSW and the Narromine Shire Council, providing a substantial contribution to the project and the environment.

Snags play an important role in river health, with studies showing that streams with snags are likely to have higher numbers of fish and invertebrates than those without. They provide hiding, spawning and resting places for native fish; rich reservoirs of food for invertebrates and other organisms; roosting places for birds; and habitat for animals such as tortoises and native water rats. Snags also assist in developing deep holes, helping maintain channel shapes and protecting banks from erosion during fast flows.

Removal of snags from NSW rivers has been listed as a key threatening process under the Fisheries Management Act 1994 because of its negative impacts on several threatened species and the endangered ecological community of the lowland catchment of the Darling River.

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Further information: ON MOBILE ONLY THIS WEEK

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Caption: Jenny and William Barker of Brewarrina at the site that was resnagged during the launch.

