

AUSTRALIAN TROUT FOUNDATION

AUSTRALIAN TROUT FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2020

Welcome to the Spring 2020 Newsletter. We hope all members are coping with the various lockdowns and restrictions in place around the country.

This has been a year of turmoil for all of us, starting with a long drought leading into some terrible fires and now the battle with the global pandemic. There has been enormous economic and social dislocation with many of us unable to work, travel, visit relatives and friends or even enjoy the simple pleasures of fishing in our favourite places. Since March the plans of the ATF have been disrupted in every state where we are active. Our many activities that involve ATF members and the wider community getting together have either been cancelled or postponed.

But we Australians are a resilient bunch and we will all come through these challenges together.

We have been busy with projects and tasks that could still be undertaken including some community engagements that could proceed when and as restrictions have been lifted.

In this newsletter we report on the positive outcomes we have achieved since the beginning of the year.

ANGLER PERCEPTIONS OF THE STATE OF THE VICTORIAN WILD TROUT FISHERY

Report by Dr Paul Stolz

In February of this year the ATF surveyed as many Victorian trout anglers as possible to ascertain their perceptions of the Victorian wild trout fishery. This survey was partly in response to the Victorian Wild Trout Strategy workshop that was conducted in Lilydale, Vic., in Oct 2019, where a five-year Victorian Wild Trout Strategy was developed.

The survey was sent electronically to approximately 2000 anglers and angling clubs. More anglers may have been invited to respond to the survey via social media links. Over 750 anglers responded providing the ATF with valuable baseline data on anglers perceptions of the Victorian wild trout fishery.

The objectives of the survey were to:

- Canvas recreational fishers thoughts on the status and value of the Victorian wild trout fishery
- Obtain data from anglers regarding the state of Victorian wild trout fishery
- Assist the ATF in targeting appropriate areas in the strategic plan

- Provide information to the VFA regarding anglers' assessment of the state of the fishery
- Add to the body of knowledge regarding the Victorian wild trout fishery
- Prioritise further research areas for investigation
- Provide an access point for people wishing to participate in ATF volunteer activities.
- Provide information to other stakeholders including VFA, the Wild Trout Reference Group (WTRG), State Recreational Fishing Roundtable Forum, Catchment Management Authorities and VRFish.

The Australian Trout Foundation has a facebook page with current news, announcements and updates.



Not an ATF Member?

Come and join with the rest of us to protect, rebuild and promote Australia's trout fishing heritage. Membership is open to any person or association with an interest in trout fishing, whether you fish with fly, lure or bait. It only costs \$25.00 per year to be an individual member and you will be helping to ensure that trout fishing in Australia remains alive and well for future generations to come.

To apply for membership or refinance your subscription go to: <http://www.atfonline.com.au/home/page/membership>

General findings from the survey were:

- Support for the introduction of minimum size limits for trout
- Support for the introduction of Blue-Ribbon Streams in the Victorian Wild Trout Fishery
- Importance of the Victorian Wild Trout Fishery to regional Victorian economies
- Angler awareness of the importance of river habitat and riparian repair
- Importance of more research to better understand climatic impacts and spawning habits of fish

- Preparedness of many anglers to volunteer to assist with in-stream habitat and riparian repair and restoration

The results of the survey present opportunities for the agencies engaged in management of the fishery, including:

- Greater regulation of the Victorian wild trout fishery
- More diversified research on the Victorian wild trout fishery and fish habits
- Benchmarking of current perceptions of the quality of the fishery against which the success of the Wild Trout Strategy can be measured over the next five years
- Extension of the social licence for the wild trout fishery given the importance to Victorian regional economies
- Improvement of the Victorian wild trout fishery through targeted volunteer programs and projects.

The ATF would like to acknowledge all the respondents and also those respondents who indicated they were prepared to volunteer for future ATF environmental projects.

The survey is a starting point and further information needs to be obtained by both the scientific research community and the citizen science of those actively involved in the Victorian wild trout fishery. The combination of these two elements conducted as a joint angling community exercise would prove beneficial to the knowledge and sustainability of the fishery into the future, at a time when it is coming under increasing pressure from angling numbers and climate change. Furthering our knowledge of the fishery from scientific and practical perspectives can only assist in the sustainability of the fishery into the future. The ATF will continue to play a significant role in both areas to further its objective of building, protecting and promoting Victoria's and Australia's trout fisheries.



Wild trout fisheries are highly valued socially and economically by anglers, regional communities and the Government in Victoria

Over the past five years, through the Wild Trout Fisheries Management Program, we have learnt a lot more about our trout fisheries, their population health and opportunities to improve their management. As a result, significant work is underway to support our wild trout fisheries.

A strategy is now required to focus further investment in maintaining wild trout fishing opportunities into the future. This strategy, drafted by a steering committee of the Australian Trout Foundation (ATF), Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA), VRFish and other wild trout fisher partners will help guide the management of our precious wild trout fishery over the next 5 years.

Vision: A healthy sustainable wild trout fishery for all Victorians.

Mission: To protect, build and promote Victoria's wild trout fishery.

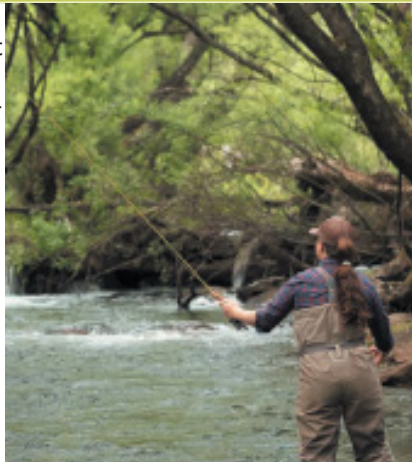
Partnership Approach: Key partners in our wild trout fishery include:



Wild Trout Learnings to Date

Wild trout are self-sustaining populations that typically occur in the higher reaches of our trout streams. Wild trout are revered for their beautiful colouration, natural breeding origin and for the remote undisturbed alpine rivers in which they are found.

The Wild Trout Fisheries Management Program (WTFMP) commenced in 2014 and is the largest collective investment in trout fisheries in Victoria. The WTFMP has led to significant benefits both in angler support and engagement and on-ground improvements.



Key findings from WTFMP include:

- Trout are adaptive and resilient, but their populations and 'catchability' are dynamic and, can fluctuate with changing environmental and climatic conditions,
- Water temperature and river flow rates are important to survival rates, growth rates and natural recruitment of wild trout,
- Hot summers and resulting high-water temperatures can severely impact trout,
- Streamside (riparian) habitat is critical for trout to buffer against changes to water temperatures, create in-stream habitat (fallen timber) and, to encourage production of terrestrial food sources,
- In-stream habitat of rocks, wood and structural complexity provide enhanced habitat for trout,
- Stocking of yearling brown trout has been shown to be ineffective in boosting populations,
- Angler engagement (and participation) is important in managing the wild trout fishery,
- There is evidence trout move upstream to cooler and or shaded reaches in hot summers.

These findings have been shared at four Talk Wild Trout Conferences between 2015-2018, with over 1000 anglers attending, sharing and networking their wild trout fishing experiences.

The Wild Trout Strategy was developed with 30 wild trout fishers through a two-day workshop on 4-5 October 2019 and a seven person steering committee consisting of representatives from ATF (two representatives), VFA (two representatives), VRFish (one representative) and two unaffiliated wild trout anglers.

The Draft Strategy was presented at the 2019 Talk Wild Trout Conference commencing a 3-month public consultation period whereby submissions were received and incorporated into the finalised Strategy.



Want to get involved or learn more?

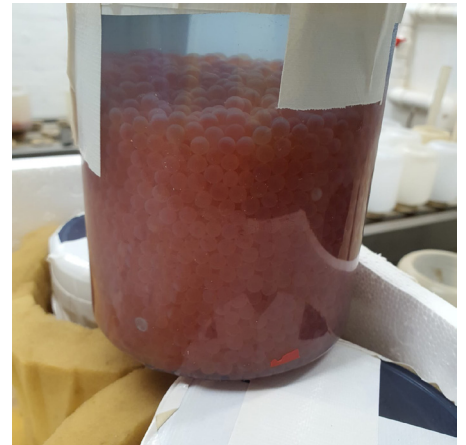
To get involved as a habitat volunteer, please email your contact details to habitat@atfonline.com.au

To learn more about the Wild Trout Strategy, please visit www.atfonline.com.au

To learn more about the Wild Trout Fisheries Management Program, please visit <https://vfa.vic.gov.au/recreational-fishing/wild-trout-fisheries-management-program>

WELCOME TO VICTORIA!

Trout eggs from NSW have been shipped from Jindabyne to Eildon. The eggs were stripped in the morning then headed off on a series of connected transport stages and more than 500kms of travel.



It was a hand-sanitised game of pass the parcel between NSW DPI Fisheries Officers and the VFA team based at Wodonga, then to the VFA hatchery team ready to be chauffeured to Snobs Creek. When they rolled into town, the



eggs were settled into the incubators at Snobs. They came from wild trout stripped and fertilised at NSW Fisheries' Gaden hatchery and they'll be incubated and hatched at Snobs before release. It's part of a trial looking into whether stocking can speed up the recovery of trout populations after the likes of drought and bushfire. The trout will be stocked as fry in mid November into the Nariel Creek, near Corryong in north-east Victoria, and monitored through fish surveys later this year. DNA samples from the parent fish will be used to compare with surveyed fish to assess the contribution the stocked trout are making. The project was organised by the VFA with assistance from Fisheries NSW, the Australian Trout Foundation, the North East CMA and the fishing community in Corryong.

STOCKING TRIALS CONTINUE

The ATF and VFA have continued the ongoing stocking trials this year, but have been unable to utilise the Jordan Scotty incubators because of travel restrictions. In late September about 20,000 first feeding brown trout fry were released into the Jamieson River by Matt Byrne the chair of the ATF stocking Committee. Matt was ably assisted by Jack and Tom Byrne and the VFA's Will Ingram. Water quality was excellent and the water was very cold. The DNA of the released fry has been recorded for research purposes.



GRANT APPLICATION SUCCESS!

The ATF has been successful in a grant application to the The Victorian Fishing Authority. By disbursing a grant of \$110,000 to the ATF the VFA gave trout fishers a huge vote of confidence delegating responsibility to the Australian Trout Foundation Vic (ATF) to manage and continue the current Wild Trout Management Program, plus additional priority actions contained in the recently distributed Victorian Wild Trout Strategy. The grant is funded by Recreational Fisher's Licence fees. The considerable advice and assistance provided by VFA's Inland Fisheries Managers to the ATF in preparation of the grant submission is greatly appreciated.

The ATF is the recognized representative body for trout fishers and it will be calling on its group of passionate volunteers for assistance to carry out a number of important priority actions that will be funded by the grant monies. Some of these priority actions are listed here for your information:

- Continue the assessment of the Jordan Scotty incubators and stocking "wild fry" as a trout population recovery tool.

Unfortunately, volunteers are unable to assist loading incubators and releasing fry this year because of COVID-19 restrictions.

- Identify locations for priority trout streams where riparian shade planting will maximize benefits to trout fisheries. Dr John Morrongiello will use the latest science to help prioritize locations alongside CMA and angler preferences. Anglers can become engaged by reporting locations that require riparian revegetation projects.

- Collect stream temperature data on priority trout rivers and make this information widely available to trout fishers via the ATF website and a new ATF App. The ATF, VFA & CMA's working together to upgrade up to 10 recording stations.

- Roll out a pilot program that enables angling clubs to manage/care for crown land river frontages. ATF, VFA & CMA's to work with DELWP to facilitate up to 4 pilot licence agreements for crown land frontages. Angler engagement by taking responsibility to manage and repair riparian land to improve fishing outcomes.

- ATF & CMA's to host 2 regional workshops per year. Following on from 3 previous successful workshops, CMA's and trout fishers to identify locations where revegetation will most benefit trout fisheries. Trout fishers can also advise on access problems.

- Promote sustainable trout fishing and sensitive harvesting practices. ATF and anglers to develop a pamphlet and videos to promote responsible trout fishing and handling practices.

- The link for the Victorian Wild Trout Strategy: <https://atfonline.com.au/home/page/Wild-Trout-Strategy>

- To our volunteers, we are looking forward to when we can meet again to continue working together with you and CMA's on river health restoration projects. Two major "trees for trout" planting days at the Steavenson & Ovens Rivers were cancelled, but GBCMA & NECMA made sound management decisions and have engaged contractors to plant the trees so as not to lose a year's growth rate.

There are many habitat restoration projects currently on the drawing board and more in planning, so when the 2021 planting season arrives next Autumn, please be assured the volunteer army will be overburdened with "trees for

trout" days in all regions. If you are not on the volunteer list, please feel free to register by emailing your contact details to: habitat@atfonline.com.au

In closing, reports from most trout regions augers well for some great fishing and we trust all will enjoy some successful fishing trips this season. We do feel for our members and volunteers in the Upper Murray and East Gippsland catchments and trust your streams will make speedy recoveries.

SURVEY OF VRFISH REPRESENTATION AND ADVOCACY.

A review of VRFish (the Victorian Recreational Fishing Peak Body) is being conducted to ensure that the broad views and aspirations of Victoria's recreational fishers are being effectively represented and advocated for. This review is being overseen by a steering committee and an independent Chair. The Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) is conducting this survey to support the review on their behalf.

VRFish was established 25 years ago and has a charter to represent and advocate for the interests of Victoria's recreational fishers. It has a membership base composed of recreational fishers, in particular, members from angling clubs and associations. It receives close to \$500,000 each year of recreational fishing licence fees under a Grant Agreement with the State of Victoria and is also able to apply for project funding that aligns with its Strategic Plan and Grant Agreement.

The VFA is keen to hear from you! Your response to this survey is extremely valuable in making sure that your voice is heard and that your views, values and aspirations are being represented and considered by VRFish when providing advice to government on how your fishing can be improved and safeguarded for the future. The responses and information you provide in this survey will go directly towards providing recommendations on improving advocacy and representation outcomes on behalf of Victoria's recreational fishers.

Your responses are confidential
The VFA is committed to protecting your information in line with Victorian privacy and data protection laws.

All of the responses and personal information you provide in this survey are confidential. Your identity will not be

matched against your responses. Only aggregated and de-identified results will be published.

The survey contains 17 questions and should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. We encourage everyone to complete the survey whether you have heard of VRFish or not. The survey will remain open until 5pm AEST on 10 November 2020.

If you require assistance completing the survey, please contact the VFA on haveyoursay@vfa.vic.gov.au

The survey forms part of a review of VRFish which resulted from a report by independent consultants Marsden Jacob Associates (available VFA Website). The ATF is represented on the review working group and requests Victoria's trout fishers to complete the survey. You can find the survey here:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/VRFish-review>

WA BRANCH NEWS

New fishing guides produced

There is a lack of readily available information on where and how to fish for trout in the Western Australia. Many tourists visiting the south west are unaware that trout can be caught in our rivers and impoundments.



The WA Branch of the ATF has set a priority to produce a series of guides with information on trout fishing. We are pleased to announce the release of the revised guide - Trout Fishing in the Harvey Waroona region and a new guide - Trout Fishing on the Murray River (the one in WA).

Production and printing of the guides was supported by a community grant from Recfishwest. The guides were presented to the public at the Troutfest event and have been distributed to tourist information centres in the region and selected tackle shops. Digital copies can be downloaded from the ATF website.

Delay to Nanga Fish Ladder Repair

The WA Branch was successful with a community grant application from Recfishwest to repair the badly damaged fish ladder on Nanga Brook. The plan was to proceed with repairs during the autumn this year when water levels in the brook are at their lowest. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 restrictions at that time prevented work on the ladder.



During winter and spring the water levels in the brook are too high to effect repairs so we are patiently monitoring levels and as soon as practicable we will get in and undertake the necessary work to make the ladder operational once more.

Troutfest 2020

On Saturday 3rd of October the WA Branch of the ATF participated in the annual Troutfest event which was held at Lake Moyanup near Waroona in Western Australia. The event was organised by Recfishwest, Fisheries and the Shire of Waroona. The public was invited to attend and assist with the stocking of ex broodstock, yearlings and fry into the lake.



There was also fly casting tuition, a fly tying exhibition and the Lions Club put on a sausage sizzle. The event has proven to be very popular with families but this year there could be no more than 300 people due to COVID-19 restrictions. We were lucky to have a perfect spring day and everyone had a good time talking about trout, releasing trout...and then trying to catch them again!

WAIFRAC and FFRG

Members of the branch represent our interests on two important committees. The Freshwater Fisheries Reference Group (FFRG) makes recommendations to the Fisheries Department each year on where and how many fry, yearlings and ex-broodstock rainbow and brown trout should be stocked into our impoundments and waterways. The branch president Dr Russell Hanley also represents the ATF on the WA Inland Fisheries Resource Advisory Council (WAIFRAC) a committee that advises on the objectives and management of the trout fishery in general including the operations of the hatchery at Pemberton. This year for the first time, the hatchery staff undertook a survey in mid summer of many of the locations where trout fry have been stocked over many decades to determine whether these locations are still suitable in a drying climate. The results of this survey have been very depressing with the majority of sites surveyed found to be bone dry in mid summer. We all knew or suspected this was now the new 'normal' but it is still shocking to have the scale of the impact of climate change on our waterways confirmed. When the findings were reported to the WAIFRAC and FFRG a review of both stocking locations and the production of fry was undertaken. Dr Hanley reviewed the stocking locations with respect to the possibility of any fry capable to find refuges when the streams dried. The good news is that some streams do still flow over summer and/or appear to hold good pools where fry could survive but the bad news is that many streams either do not have suitable refuges or fry cannot reach the main river and so it is simply not worthwhile stocking them on some waters. The Hatchery staff have now developed a plan to reduce the number of fry produced by half (680k to 350k) and in so doing can reduce the number of broodstock fish by half thereby freeing up ponds for yearling production. In a put and take fishery it makes sense to release fish at a size (and time) when they will be close to the legal size limit and set free into waters of reasonable volume and quality. Members of the ATF can provide useful information on the remaining fry stocking locations by noting the presence or absence of water over summer and the presence of fry.