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MORE DEAD WOOD A GOOD THING FOR NATIVE FISH

Getting 'snagged' can be frustrating for anglers, but 3000 extra woody habitats laid in the Murray River over the last 3 years are now paying dividends for native fish.

Dr Wendy Craik AM, CE of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission which funds the project, said the return of snags to the river was already proving successful for native fish despite the ravages of drought.

"We are delighted with the initial results as scientific surveys conducted between Hume Dam and Yarrowonga have detected native fish using the resnagged reaches including Murray cod and trout cod," Dr Craik said.

Jarod Lyon, a scientist with the Department of Sustainability and Environment's Arthur Rylah Institute (ARI), said that ARI began monitoring the project in July 2006 by fitting native fish with external tags to help monitor their movements and use of the new habitats.

"Anglers are playing an important role in the research by recording the tag numbers and locations of their native catch over time," Mr Lyon said.

"Angler tag returns help us understand how the re-snagging of the river affects key populations of our precious native fish species.

"We have some early indication that the total number of native fish in the resnagged reach of river is increasing due to the new habitat.

"Further monitoring in coming years will help refine exactly what role the new snags will play in the recovery of native fish populations in the River Murray."

Historically, wood and other instream habitats were removed from many rivers for riverboat navigation, increased water flow for irrigation and to protect surrounding infrastructure. In the Murray-Darling Basin rivers in south-eastern Australia, records indicate that several million trees were removed.

"By resnagging the River Murray we are aiming to reverse the negative impacts of past practices and give native fish habitat to spawn, feed and avoid predators," Mr Lyon said.

Anglers are being encouraged to call the number printed on the tag of native fish and provide information about the length of fish and location of capture.

"Any additional information that we can receive from anglers adds great value to our research and ensures the recovery and long-term sustainability of our native fish," Mr Lyon said.

Anglers who have joined the program have captured many Murray cod in the study area since December 2007, of which more than 95% have been released.

The Murray River resnagging project is funded by the Murray Darling Basin Commission's (MDBC) *The Living Murray* program. It is a partnership between the Victorian North East Catchment Management Authority, the NSW Departments of Primary Industries and Natural Resources, and Victoria's Department of Sustainability and Environment.

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