

Environment SA News

## Native fish survey nets large scale finding at Bookmark Creek

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In further evidence of ecological improvements at Bookmark Creek in South Australia's Riverland, ecologists have found juvenile golden perch and freshwater catfish in the area.

The Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board Wetlands and Floodplain team undertook fish surveys in Bookmark Creek throughout March 2022 with the Bookmark Creek Action Group and St Francis of Assisi College students and were excited to discover these species in the system again.

Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board Wetland Project Officer Stephanie Robinson said golden perch and catfish are known to exist in the creek but are usually only found in small numbers during high flow events.

"We caught two adult and two juvenile freshwater catfish in this year's autumn survey, which is very exciting considering we have no records of juvenile freshwater catfish caught in the past in this system."

"The juvenile large-bodied native fish caught during these surveys in the last two years is a great indication of breeding events that may have been triggered by the recent unregulated flows or weir pool raising."

"It was great to have students from St Francis of Assisi College in Renmark and the local BCAG members come along and be involved in the survey."

The discovery shows an increase in fish diversity and abundance in the creek and supports the Sustaining Riverland Environments (SRE) program that is seeking to improve environmental conditions within Bookmark Creek.

The SRE program is in the final stages of design for proposed Bookmark Creek infrastructure upgrades at Jane Eliza Estate and Nelwart Street that will reinstate more natural habitat conditions for the type of native species found by the wetlands team.

SRE project team lead with the Department for Environment and Water, Nathan Clisby said upgrades to the Jane Eliza Inlet regulator include a multi-purpose

passage for aquatic life such as fish and turtles as well as for community benefit with canoe passage and a pedestrian bridge.

“These fish finds are exciting and show exactly why we need this infrastructure and rejuvenation work to continue supporting the aquatic life in Bookmark Creek,” Nathan said.

“They will improve flow conditions for the movement of the large-bodied native fish that the wetlands team are currently finding, as well as enhance community experience and recreation opportunities.

“The work at Nelwart Street bridge will replace existing infrastructure and open up the crossing to improve connectivity and movement for these native fish, which will also create ideal conditions for the growth of aquatic habitat.

“This project is about creating better connectivity and passage for fish through the creek, by undertaking works on a series of structures which currently impede fish movement.

“The existing regulator currently restricts flow and impedes fish movement so the proposed works seek to improve access to habitat for large-bodied native fish.”

*The Sustaining Riverland Environments Program is a \$37.6 million program funded by the Australian Government through the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and delivered by the Government of South Australia through the Department for Environment and Water.*

*This project is contributing to enhanced environmental outcomes on a local scale which will complement environmental watering activities which have been made possible under the Basin Plan.*

*The Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board Wetlands and Floodplain team monitoring work was supported by the Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board through funding from the Australian Government’s National Landcare Program and landscape levies.*