

True
TALES
of the
TROUT COD:

RIVER HISTORIES OF THE
MURRAY-DARLING BASIN

Will Trueman



Lachlan River
CATCHMENT



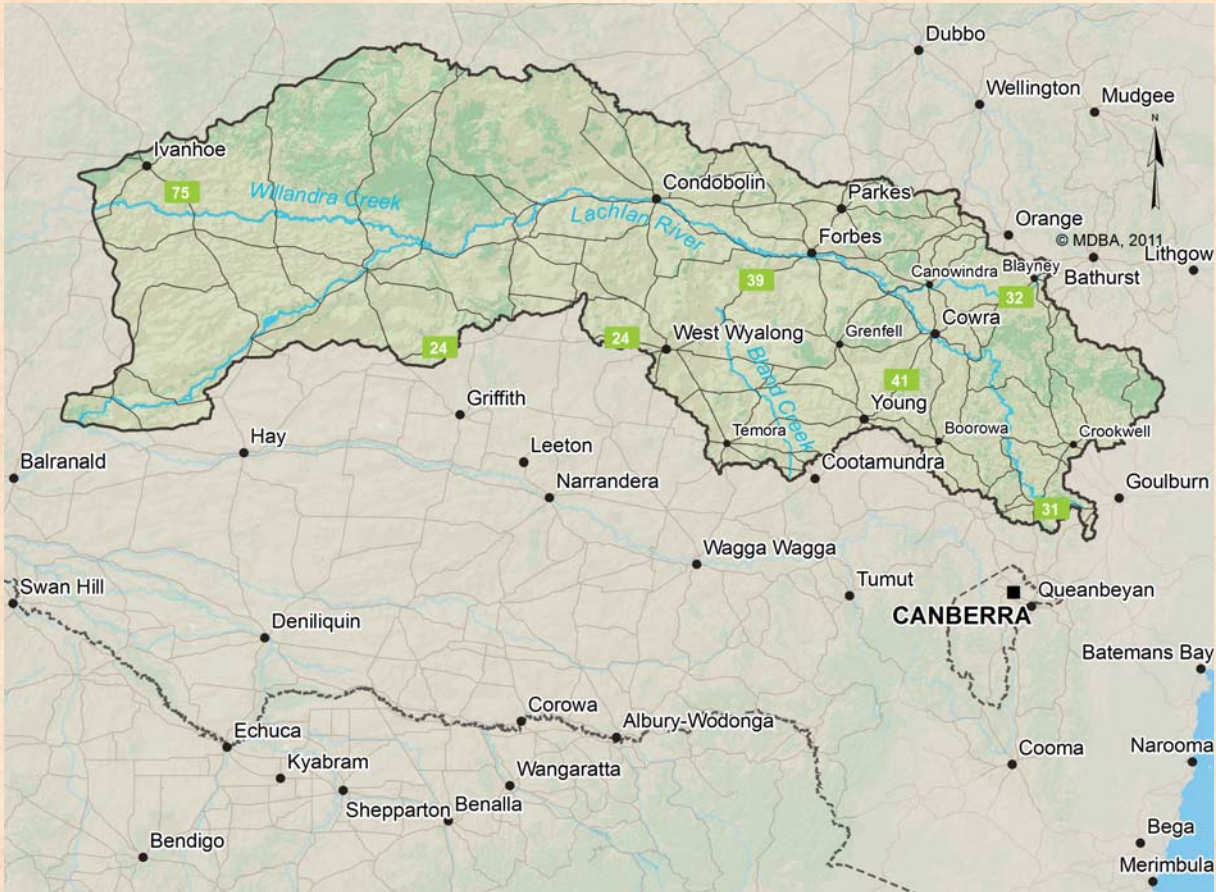
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The Australian River Restoration Centre



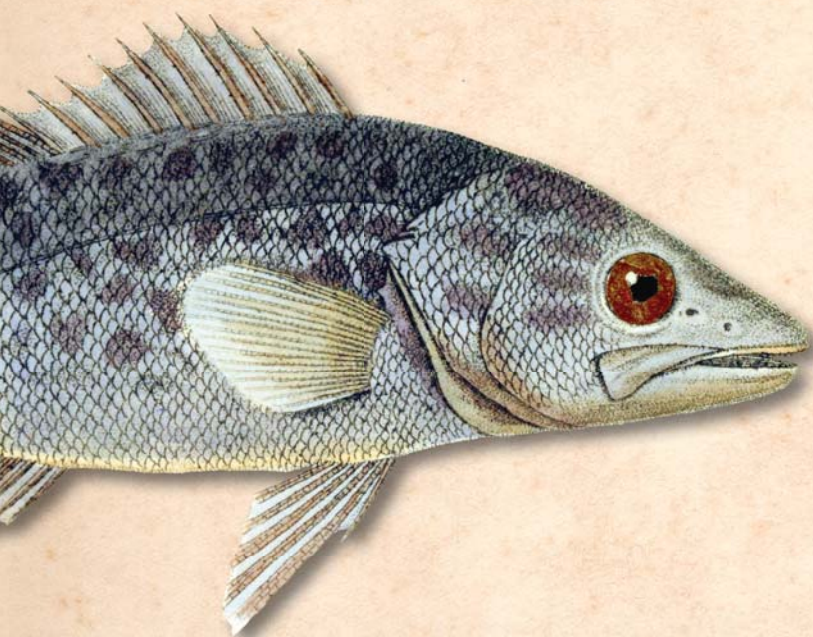
The Lachlan River catchment showing major waterways and key localities



Front cover, main image: William Burns and Dianne Flint in a boat on Wyangala Dam c1955. **Top image:** Arthur 'Tibby' Flint with a catch of fish including Murray Cod, Golden Perch and Catfish from Wyangala Dam c1945/50. Both photos courtesy of Arthur 'Tibby' Flint. **Fish:** Lithograph of *Gristes macquariensis* created by Felix Guérin-Méneville of the holotype for the Trout Cod published in *Iconographie de regne animal de G. Cuvier*, vol. 1, in 1836. Captured from the Macquarie River at Bathurst in 1824. Reproduced with permission from the State Library of Victoria.

Lachlan River

C A T C H M E N T



THE LACHLAN

(From the Empire's Correspondent)

March 30.—The continued absence of rain causing stoppage of the puddling machines for want of water, is the sole reason of the small escort leaving tomorrow. As before stated, the river, one mile distant, is tabooed for washing purposes to the last dregs, so that the returns per escort will diminish until we are blessed with the winter's rain.

Great quantities of fish have this week been picked up by hand out of the bed of the lagoon between the Victoria and Caledonian loads, some of the codfish weighing over 30 pounds weight, besides bream, perch and jewfish, the latter being one of the oddest of the finny tribe, presenting the appearance of half newt, with porpoise head and feelers round the mouth. This fish deposits its ova in a gravelly cell on the bottom using stones of upwards of a pound weight in their construction (as a blackfellow asserts). Certain it is that little mounds, of beehive form, abound in this lagoon, containing gravel.

Maitland Mercury & Hunter River Advertiser,
5 April 1862

*True Tales of the Trout Cod: River Histories of the Murray–Darling Basin
(Lachlan River catchment booklet)*

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The MDBA and Will Trueman acknowledge the intellectual property rights of the people whose stories are featured in this publication.

Aboriginal readers are warned that this publication may contain the names or images of Aboriginal people who have since passed away.

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Lachlan River

C A T C H M E N T

Sydney Morning Herald, 20 June 1860

FISHING IN THE LACHLAN

A party of Chinamen, on their way to the Tuena gold-fields, during last week, encamped on the banks of the Lachlan, a few miles from Reids Flat, were fortunate in securing about one hundred and seventy pounds of fish in the space of half-an-hour. The banks of the river are studded with blind creeks and lagoons, which are supplied by the efflux of the stream, and into one of these pools or creeks the Chinese shed a quantity of that powerful narcotic known to chemists as *cuculeus indicus*, and its effects soon became visible by the quantities of beautiful cod and bream fish floating on the surface which were speedily transferred to the Chinese's tent and pickled for future use.

Early European accounts

GEORGE EVANS EXPLORED west of Bathurst and in May 1815, encountered a large stream which was to be named the Abercrombie River. Later, he reached a larger river between Cowra and Canowindra, exploring downstream to near the present site of Forbes. He named it the 'Lachlan River' in honour of Governor Macquarie (Scott, 2005). In 1817, John Oxley, accompanied by botanist Allan Cunningham, undertook a further exploration of the Lachlan River downstream to the extensive marshes near the confluence with the Murrumbidgee River. Oxley was impressed by the abundance of fish:

Many fish were caught here, one of which weighed upwards of thirty pounds. / If however the country itself is poor, the river is rich in the most excellent fish, procurable in the utmost abundance. One man in less than an hour caught eighteen large fish, one of which was a curiosity from its immense size, and the beauty of its colours. In shape and general form it most resembled a cod, but was speckled over with brown, blue and yellow spots like a leopard's skin; its gills and belly a clear white, the tail and fin a dark brown. It weighed an entire seventy pounds, and without the entrails sixty-six pounds. (Oxley, 1820)

The 70 pound monster was described by Cunningham as 'the largest that has been caught' and he recorded that the catch on one day was 190 to 200 pounds (86.4 to 90.9 kg) of fish (Lee, 1925).

In 1834, naturalist and surgeon Dr Johann Lhotsky, travelled south through the Gunning area to explore the upper Murrumbidgee catchment. On the 25th of January he camped on the headwaters of the Lachlan River upstream of Gunning. At the time the river was known as the Fish River, probably named like its predecessor near Bathurst, for containing fish in abundance. Lhotsky caught and ate cod upstream of Gunning, recording the presence of cod in a tributary stream of the Fish River in Gunning itself:

We left the bank of the Fish River at an early hour. The road tended now toward Mr. Kennedy's farm, about which granite is the predominant formation. The latter farm is situated in what is called Goneng Valley intersected by a chain of Ponds. These, the tendency of which is towards the Lachlan, as well as those which run into the Murrumbidgee, and which I traversed afterwards, abound with fish, amongst these, a freshwater cod is the most remarkable, of which some were caught hereabout, weighing as much as 90 pounds. (Lhotsky, 1979)

In March 1838, Major Thomas Mitchell travelled along the Lachlan River from Eugowra to near Forbes. The party caught Catfish out of holes from a creek near Eugowra. Mitchell described them as 'eel-fish', and during his first expedition in 1832 along the Barwon River, gave them a species name of *Plotosus tandanus*. In the later trip, the party netted a 17 pound (7.7 kg) Silver Perch and a 12 pound Catfish from the Goobang Creek near Condobolin:

On dragging our net through the muddy pond we captured two fishes, but of monstrous size, one weighing 17 pounds, the other about 12 pounds. Although very different in shape, I recognised in them the fish of the perch kind with large scales and the eel-fish formerly caught by us in the Namoi. (Mitchell, 1838)

Mitchell also recorded catching Murray Cod, identified as *Gristes peelii*, from the Lachlan River near Lake Cargellico.

Samuel Mossman and Thomas Banister wrote extensively on their travels through Victoria and New South Wales in 1852. On a visit to a property near Binalong they recorded that the Boorowa River was 'full of fine fish' (Mossman & Banister, 1853). Mossman and Banister had been lured to the area by the prospect of making a fortune from gold. Accounts from the miners record that there was an abundance of fish in the upper Lachlan catchment. The *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1860 reported how:

'A party of Chinamen, on their way to the Tuena gold-fields, during last week, encamped on the banks of the Lachlan, a few miles from Reid's Flat, were fortunate in securing about one hundred and seventy pounds of fish in the space of half-an-hour' which included 'quantities of beautiful cod and bream fish'. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 June 1860)

In 1869, the same paper reported that the Tuena Creek 'abounds in cod fish, perch and bream' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 July 1869). The Yeo Yeo or Bland Creek near Stockinbingal also abounded in fish. On one occasion a man caught 90 fish with his bare hands, and a man and his wife angled 'no fewer than 453, weighing from ½ lb. to 8 lb. each. These fish were chiefly bream, perch, and cod' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 November 1872).

Sydney Morning Herald, 3 July 1869

RICH GOLD DISCOVERY AT TRUNKEY CREEK

TUENA / It is situated on Tuena Creek, about 4½ miles distant from its junction with the Abercrombie River, which runs about 5 miles N. of Tuena, and traverses the district from E. to W. It is of considerable magnitude, and at times, during floods, rises to a height of thirty feet above its usual level. It abounds in cod fish, perch and bream.

Sydney Morning Herald, 6 November 1872

FISH IN THE MURRUMBIDGEE

It is not often (says the Wagga Advertiser) that one hears of so splendid a haul of fish as that which was made a few days ago at Geraldra. Our informant, Mr. Allen, mentions that while they were at dinner one of his servants brought him upwards of ninety fish of all sorts and sizes, which had been captured in the Yeo Yeo Creek, without the aid of net or line, but simply with the hands. Subsequently one man and his wife caught no fewer than 453, weighing from ½ lb. to 8 lb. each. They were chiefly bream, perch, and cod, and were taken in the ordinary way with a hook.

The early accounts record an astonishing abundance of fish in the lower Lachlan River. A newspaper describes how:

‘...owing to the succession of floods this season we have the River Lachlan teeming with these fish—fine fellows, from 20 to 30 lbs weight being constantly caught, and the fish can be seen making their way up the river in large numbers.’ (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 December 1863)

Another account recorded how at Forbes heavy rain was followed:

‘... by the sickening of thousands of fish, large numbers dying, and the rest becoming so helpless that they could be speared or caught by the hand without any trouble. In this manner hundreds were caught in the neighbourhood of the town, several specimens of the cod, weighing upwards of 40 lbs, and two between 50 lbs and 60 lbs, being brought to land out of a deep hole near the new bridge.’ (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 December 1866)

John Langtry during his 1949–52 fish survey of the Murray–Darling system reported on the commercial fishery in the Hillston area, as well as carrying out netting operations in the Willandra Creek. He recounted anecdotes about the fishery

from a number of professional fishermen as far upstream as Forbes. Langtry reported that Murray Cod, Golden Perch, Silver Perch and an abundance of Catfish was present in the lower Lachlan River. He also noted an absence of Trout Cod and Macquarie Perch (Cadwallader, 1977).

The past distribution of fishes in the Lachlan River catchment

The *Sustainable Rivers Audit* (Davies et al., 2008) divided the Lachlan catchment into a lowland zone (downstream from Condobolin), a slopes zone (upstream to Wyangala Dam), an upland zone (upstream to Gunning and Jerrong) and a montane zone beyond the latter locations. The physical form of the Lachlan River below Forbes is of low gradient, effectively unconfined with extensive billabong and anabranches. For simplicity, the lowland zone is treated here as being downstream of Forbes, and all other habitat zones match those in the *Sustainable Rivers Audit*.

Jane Roberts and Geoff Sainty provided a detailed oral history of the environment of the Lachlan River downstream of Eugowra, effectively covering the entire lowland zone (Roberts & Sainty, 1996). They presented oral history of the fish going back to the 1920s, supported by newspaper accounts. Most of the information presented on the lowland zone is sourced from their work, supported by additional oral history. Much of the information on the slopes, upland and montane zones is largely from oral histories of senior residents recalling their own experiences, as well as stories told to them by past generations (mainly oral histories (OH) 22–36). Some early detailed newspaper accounts and information published in the annual reports of NSW State Fisheries is used, as well as a few old photographs of catches of native fish in the catchment.

The montane zone

Lhotsky's observations in 1834 indicate that cod penetrated the upper Lachlan catchment into the montane zone upstream of Gunning. His use of the phrase 'amongst these, a freshwater cod is the most remarkable' suggests that more than one species was present (Lhotsky, 1979). His catches, supported by general observations, indicate that cod were at least reasonably common in the montane Lachlan River and some creeks. Second hand oral history from the early years of the 20th century supports his account of the existence of cod in the montane zone. Cod were present in the Jerrong and Wiaborough Creeks (McAllister, OH 23) and in the Abercrombie River upstream of Jerrong (Newman, OH 22). The specific species of cod in the montane zone is unknown. Based on oral history, both cod species were present in the upland zone, with Trout Cod the more prevalent (Flint, OH 32; Lewis, OH 28). It may be inferred that this may also have applied to the montane zone.

The only account of Macquarie Perch in the montane zone describes their presence in numbers in the Jerrong area (Newman, OH 22). They were once abundant in rivers near the top of the upland zone (Lewis, OH 28; Croker, OH 24) suggesting that they were probably common in larger montane habitats. Oral history recalls Blackfish to have once been fairly abundant in some rivers and creeks in the montane zone (Newman, OH 22; McAllister, OH 23; Lewis, OH 28). Catfish were occasionally caught in the montane zone near Jerrong (Newman, OH 22) but there is no evidence of the other large native fish species being present in this zone (McAllister, OH 23).

The upland zone

The upland zone above the present Wyangala Dam, was formerly a region of high fish diversity. Cod were abundant in both the Lachlan and Abercrombie Rivers (Motum, OH 29; Croker, OH 24; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 June 1860;

Sydney Morning Herald, 27 September 1893

TRUNKEY, Tuesday. / The fish in the Abercrombie are biting freely. Some fine cod were hooked on Thursday night, one fish being 8 lb. in weight.

27 September 1893), and common in the larger creeks such as the Bolong, Burra and Tuena (Croker, OH 24; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 July 1869). Rod Harrison's capture of a Trout Cod (LR5) from the Lachlan River at Reids Flat c1968, confirms that the species was present in the Lachlan catchment and specifically in the upland zone. A number of oral accounts recall the past presence of Trout Cod, including some good descriptions of the fish (Flint, OH 32; Motum, OH 29; Lewis, OH 28; Hanrahan, OH 25). Three accounts suggest that both cod species were common, but that Trout Cod were more prevalent, particularly further upstream (Flint, OH 32; Motum, OH 29; Lewis, OH 28).

Macquarie Perch were once abundant in the rivers of the upland zone, including the Lachlan, Abercrombie and Boorowa (Croker, OH 24; Hanrahan, OH 25; Elvins, OH 30; Stacey, OH 26). This fish also had a strong presence in small creeks such as the Bramah, Mulgowrie and Taylors Creeks (Elvins, OH 30), as well as Tuena Creek (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 July 1869). It has been reported that, until 1970, a small population of Macquarie Perch existed in the upland Belubula River (Harrison, 1977; Rod Harrison, pers. com.). They were naturally present in the Belubula River up to a waterfall near Junction Reefs which was impassable (Dick Elvins, pers. com.). The upland population appears to have been translocated from the Bathurst area in the early 1880s (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 March 1886). Blackfish were generally abundant in all the waters in the upland zone, including the rivers and small creeks (Croker, OH 24; Hanrahan, OH 25; Lewis, OH 28).

Oral history (OH) 25

Peter Hanrahan of Bathurst was interviewed in November 2007 at an age of 55 years.

I'm only 55, but my father Lambert Lake Hanrahan had a few stories about the fish, he grew up around Triangle Flat, that's near Burruga. He told me about the Abercrombie, how there was a fire out there in 1929, and that knocked the cod about, but there was the bad one in 1939 and then a flood, that knocked them right out. He was only a kid, but he remembered going out there fishing with his older brothers and his father. There were cod and that many Catfish up to 4 pound, they threw them up behind the logs, they were after the cod.

There was stacks of what he called the bluegut, they used to go in behind Trunkey Creek, and there was three holes, at Rosebottom, the Sounder Hole and the Sandy Hole. He never caught yellowbelly there, but he caught what he called the silver bream and the black bream. I'm sure he talked about the rock cod there too, and how they used to love the rocky water holes out there. The Abercrombie silted up in the 1930s, all the sand come down the Bolong. I've caught stacks of Macquaries out of the Abercrombie, they're still there up above the Retreat River.

In the Macquarie, there was this old barber in Bathurst back in the '70s, old Miller. He used to talk about catching Macquarie Perch in the Randwick Hole, along the Bridle Track, that's about 30 k's below The Forge towards Hill End. It would have been the '40s when he was talking about catching them. We used to tell him he was a 'silly old bastard, that there was no Macquarie Perch in the Macquarie!' I remember an acquaintance of my father, Offo Press; he talked about all the cod that used to be caught at Mt David, and what they called the bream, that's up quite high on the Campbell River. He was talking about the 1920s.

The oral history records indicate that prior to the construction of Wyangala Dam, Golden Perch were regularly taken in reasonable numbers at Reids Flat (Motum, OH 29), occasionally at Reidsdale (Lewis, OH 28) and sometimes in the lower Abercrombie River (Crocker, OH 24; Hanrahan, OH 25). In later years they were also taken in small numbers from the Boorowa River (Elvins, OH 30). While regularly encountered they were not very common, particularly in the upper reaches of this zone. Good numbers of Catfish and Silver Perch were present in the Abercrombie River (Crocker, OH 24; Hanrahan, OH 25; Stacey, OH 26), and good numbers of Silver Perch with some Catfish, were taken from the Lachlan River at Reidsdale (Lewis, OH 28). Catches of Silver Perch rivalled those of Macquarie Perch in the Lachlan River, and were very common to abundant (Lewis, OH 28). In general, the numbers for these three species progressively fell further upstream, with Silver Perch reported to be the only one found in any amount near the top of the upland zone (Lewis, OH 28).

The slopes zone

This section of the Lachlan River is reported to have contained all the larger native fish species, with Arthur Flint providing a detailed first hand account of the fishery back to the 1920s. There was a noticeable decrease in abundance of Trout Cod and Macquarie Perch near Cowra compared to upstream of Wyangala (Flint, OH 32). Murray Cod were very common at Cowra, but Trout Cod were caught in smaller numbers, being much more common upstream towards the gorges in the Wyangala region (Flint, OH 32). Neil Cambell reported that two Trout Cod were taken near Canowindra in the 1960s (Cambell, OH 34) which were formally identified by members of NSW State Fisheries (Neil Cambell, pers. com.). Cod were also very common in some major tributaries such as the Belubula River near Forrest Reefs (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 September 1910; 9 January 1912) and in the Bland Creek near Stockinbingal (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 November 1872; *Sydney Mail*, 3 January 1923).

Sydney Morning Herald, 2 September 1910

FOREST REEFS, Thursday. Owing to the discoloured waters of the Belabula River, fish do not appear to bite too well, though cod up to 3 lb. weight, several trout, and many slipperies were landed last week. These slipperies are equal to garfish. Some sport catching these in different creeks may now be had.

Sydney Morning Herald, 1 December 1863

ACCLIMATISATION SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES. / “Just now,” said the writer “owing to the succession of floods this season we have the River Lachlan teeming with these fish—fine fellows, from 20 to 30 lbs weight being constantly caught, and the fish can be seen making their way up the river in large numbers.”

Macquarie Perch were regular captures near Cowra, but secondary in abundance to Golden Perch and Silver Perch (Flint, OH 32; Bryan, OH 33). A newspaper account describes ‘bream’ and ‘perch’ being abundant in the Bland Creek near Stockinbingal in 1872 (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 November 1872) however, it is impossible to determine their identity. The fish appeared to have declined progressively downstream in this zone being abundant at Wyangala, common at Cowra and occasionally captured near Canowindra (Flint, OH 32; Cambell, OH 34). Catfish were abundant in the Lachlan River near Cowra (Flint, OH 32) and in some tributaries towards the bottom of the slopes zone (Roberts & Sainty, 1996). Blackfish were abundant at Cowra (Flint, OH 32), and at times large captures were taken in the Lachlan River near Canowindra (Craven, OH 35) and in the Belubula River and its tributaries (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 September 1910, 3 September 1910).

The lowland zone

In the lowland zone there appears to have been Murray Cod, Golden and Silver Perch, and Catfish in abundance in the Lachlan River, major anabranches, creeks, lakes (Roberts & Sainty, 1996; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 December 1863; Craven, OH 35; Cussack, OH 36) and in the lagoons (*Maitland Mercury & Hunter River Advertiser*, 5 April 1862). The lower Lachlan once supported a substantial commercial fishery for cod (NSW Fisheries Reports, 1898–1928), and in

Lake Cargellico cod were considered to be ‘easily caught’ (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 April 1911). Langtry reported that Trout Cod were absent from the lower Lachlan around 1950 (Cadwallader, 1977), and a commercial fisherman familiar with the species, J. H. Jarman of Narrandera, reported the same situation in 1920 (*Argus*, 1 October 1920). A news item from Forbes records the capture of a number of very unusual cod that were dark coloured cod with a ‘pronounced hump on the shoulders’ (*Forbes Advocate*, 8 May 1917). This may be a description of Trout Cod, but is too limited in detail to be conclusive. The collective evidence is that Trout Cod were absent or at best very rare in the lowland zone.

Macquarie Perch appear to have been absent in most of the lowland zone. Grove Craven, who fished the lower Lachlan since the 1920s, could not recall seeing a Macquarie Perch downstream of Euabalong (Craven, OH 35) and they were unreported by Langtry in the lower Lachlan at the end of the Second World War (Cadwallader, 1977). The *Western Champion* of 25 April 1918, recorded a party of anglers catching Murray Cod, Golden Perch, Catfish, Macquarie Perch and Blackfish from the Bundaburra Creek near Forbes. While not conclusive, due to possible confusion with Silver Perch, it suggests that some Macquarie Perch were present at the top of the lowland zone. The account is significant, as it clearly describes the presence of Blackfish in lowland habitat. There are no historical records of Trout Cod, Macquarie Perch or Blackfish downstream of Forbes, but a minor presence is plausible,

particularly for Blackfish, which have been reported from the lower Murrumbidgee near the confluence of the Lachlan.

Golden Perch and Silver Perch were abundant along the length of the lower Lachlan (Craven, OH 35; Cussack, OH 36). Catfish were particularly abundant in some creeks such as Goobang and Bundaburra Creeks. In Bundaburra Creek, 81 Catfish averaging 2 pounds (0.9 kg) were taken on one occasion (Roberts & Sainty, 1996; *Western Champion*, 16 December 1915). In lagoons near Forbes, Catfish were present and extensive nest construction was reported (*Maitland Mercury & Hunter River Advertiser*, 5 April 1862). A similar situation existed in local lakes such as Lakes Brewster and Cargellico, where Catfish were once the most abundant species taken by anglers (Roberts & Sainty, 1996).

Estimates of native fish abundance in the Lachlan River catchment at European settlement

Presented are the rarity scores used in the *Sustainable Rivers Audit* (SRA) (Davies et al., 2008) which were developed by an expert panel using historical evidence available prior to 2008. They indicate the probability of capturing a particular fish species using standardised survey techniques such as electrofishing. They are compared to those developed in the 'True Tales of the Trout Cod' project which uses more recently obtained historical evidence and is based on the typical size of angler catches in the oldest accounts.

	Lachlan River catchment rarity scores (main river channels)									
	Lowland (downstream of Forbes)		Slopes (Forbes to Wyangala Dam)		Upland (Wyangala Dam to Gunning and Jerrong)		Montane (upstream of Gunning and Jerrong)			
Species	SRA	True Tales	SRA	True Tales	SRA	True Tales	SRA †	True Tales		
Trout Cod	0	0	3	L3	3	5	1	3		
Murray Cod	3	5	5	5	5	3	3	L3		
Golden Perch	5	5	5	5	5	1	3	0		
Silver Perch	5	5	5	5	3	L5	0	0		
Macquarie Perch	0	0	3	3	5	5	5	L5		
Catfish	5	5	5	5	5	U3	3	1		
'Blackfish'	0	L1	1	U3	5	5	5	L5		

Key

- 0 = Absent: no credible account reporting the species former presence
- 1 = Rare: a few individual fish could be expected to be taken by a resident angler each year
- 3 = Common: regularly taken by a resident angler in small numbers
- 5 = Abundant: frequently taken by a resident angler in good numbers

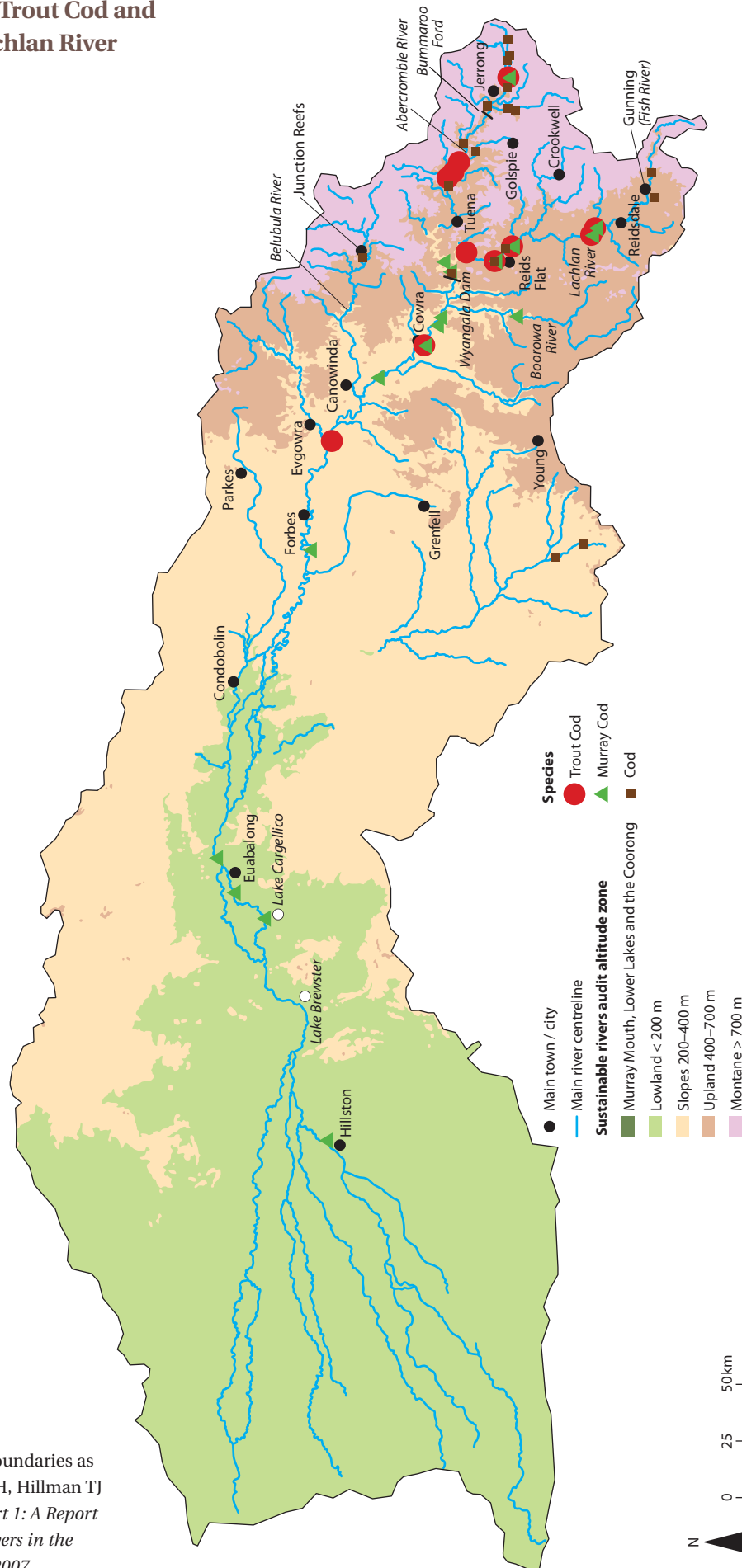
L = Abundance at the lower end rating

U = Abundance at the upper end rating

Ratings in bold type supported by multiple accounts or lines of evidence e.g. oral history, newspaper accounts, photographs.

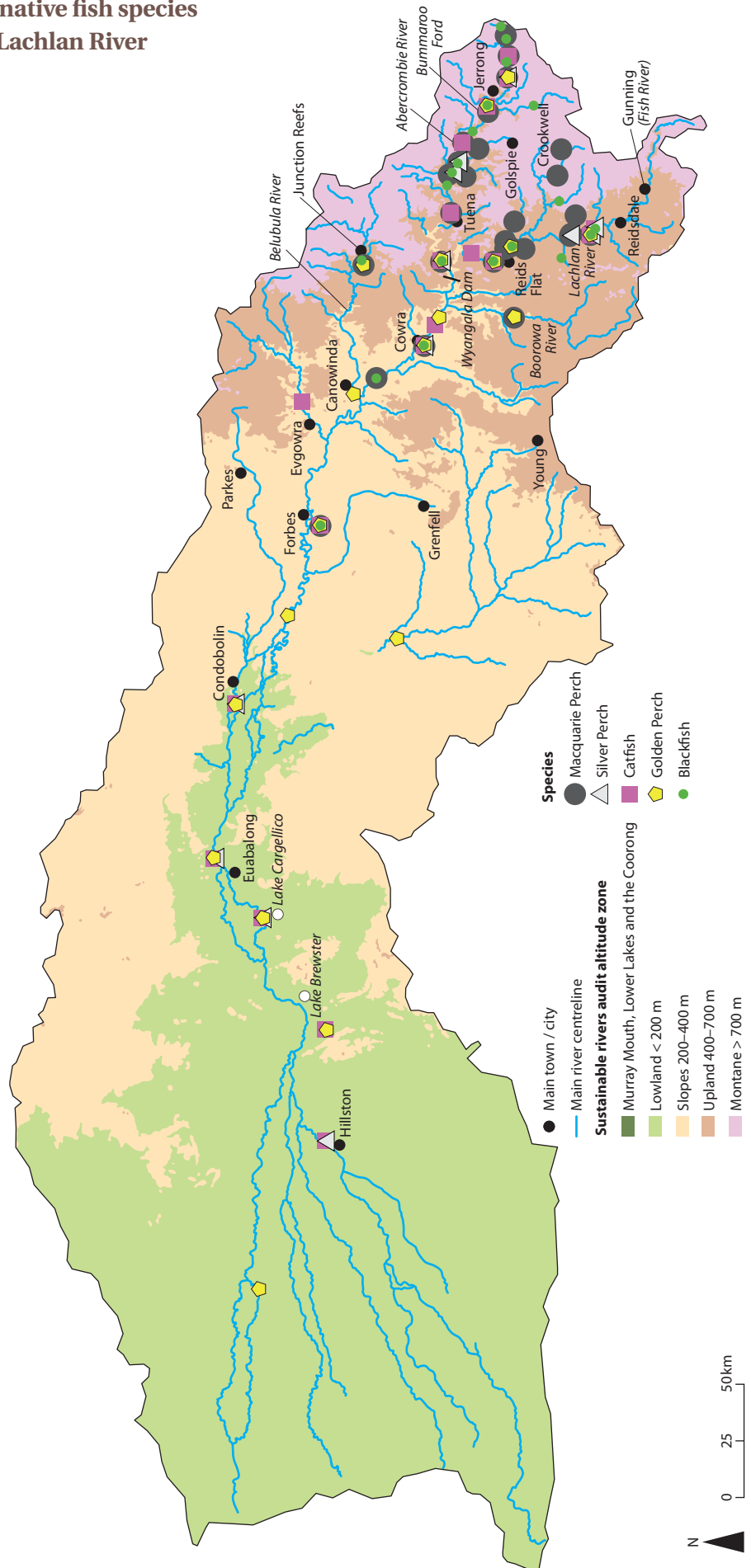
† Note: The expert panel did not develop a set of species rarity scores in the montane zone in this catchment for the *Sustainable Rivers Audit*.

Historical records for Trout Cod and Murray Cod in the Lachlan River catchment



These maps use catchment boundaries as defined in Davies PE, Harris JH, Hillman TJ & Walker KF (2008), *SRA Report 1: A Report on the Ecological Health of Rivers in the Murray–Darling Basin, 2004–2007*.

Historical records for native fish species other than cod in the Lachlan River catchment



The changes

Changes to native fish distribution and abundance

A handful of accounts provide limited information on the decline of native fish in the montane zone. Cod had declined by the early 20th century and completely disappeared by the 1920s (Newman, OH 22; McAllister, OH 23). Macquarie Perch were largely restricted to the lower reaches of this zone by the 1920s, but persisted in numbers in the Jerrong area, and near Crookwell until the 1950s (Newman, OH 22; Lewis, OH 28). By the 1920s, Blackfish are reported to have undergone a decline in some waters, with the fish vanishing from many areas by the 1950s (Newman, OH 22; Lewis, OH 28).

Early in the 20th century, the upland zone still contained significant native fish populations. Major declines are reported by the 1930s, and cod were generally rare by this time (Flint, OH 32; Elvins, OH 30) though small numbers were captured in the Narrawa area until the 1950s (Lewis, OH 28). Isolated captures of cod subsequently took place, with the last reported capture of Trout Cod occurring in 1968 (Rod Harrison; pers. com.). Macquarie Perch, Silver Perch and Catfish flourished in the newly constructed Wyangala Dam in the 1930s (Motum, OH 29; Flint, OH 32). By the 1950s, Macquarie Perch had undergone a decline in the Abercrombie River, Lachlan River and tributaries near Reids Flat (Croker, OH 24; Beer, OH 31; Elvins, OH 30). By the 1960s, this was also the case in the Narrawa area (Lewis, OH 28). Blackfish disappeared from a number of small streams during the 1950s (Beer, OH 31; Elvins, OH 30).

Near Cowra, a decline in the abundance of Macquarie Perch and Trout Cod commenced during the 1930s and this meant that by the 1950s Macquarie Perch were rare, and Trout Cod virtually absent (Arthur Flint, pers. com.). In the lowland zone, declines in native fish populations in some areas were observed by the 1950s, with a serious decline noted by the 1970s (Roberts & Sainty, 1996).



Photo LR1: Arthur 'Tibby' Flint with a catch of fish including Murray Cod, Golden Perch and Catfish downstream of Wyangala Dam c1945/50. Photo courtesy of Tibby Flint.



Photo LR5: Respected angling writer Rod Harrison captured this Trout Cod while spinning for trout in the Lachlan River at Reids Flat c1968. Rod also played an instrumental role in the discovery of the Trout Cod population and hybrids in the Cataract Reservoir near Sydney. The photograph confirms the historic presence of the species in the upper Lachlan and supports the accounts of Joe Lewis, Mona Motum and Tibby Flint that the species was once prevalent in those waters. Photo courtesy of Rod Harrison.

Changes to habitat

Mining and agriculture caused silting of some upland waters, with Junction Reefs Dam on the Belubula River filling with silt by 1920 (Scott, 2001). Silting of holes in the lower Abercrombie River was evident by the 1930s (Croker, OH 24), and this was widespread in the upper Lachlan River by the 1960s, with many holes completely disappearing (Elvins, pers. com.). By 1972, the upper Lachlan generated one of the highest annual sediment yields per square kilometre—almost double that of the upper Murrumbidgee River and upper Murray Rivers (Scott, 2001).

Large fish kills associated with drought occurred in the lower Lachlan in 1919 but were considered natural, with fish populations subsequently recovering (NSW Fisheries Reports, 1919; 1930). Kills attributed to mining pollution took place in the Belubula River in March 1907 (NSW Fisheries Report, 1907), and again in July of that year when it was reported that ‘copper, with which the water from the mine is impregnated, has coloured the stream blue, and fish in hundreds are floating dead on the surface’ (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 July 1907).

OH 27

Wayne Burns of Triangle Flat was interviewed in November 2007 at an age of 58 years.

...

Just thinking about what they said, the cod were about 5 to 10 pound; 10 pound was a big one. They said they used to catch the cod there, and they talked about the black bream. There was another fish out there, the slipperies, they mentioned them but they didn't fish for them, they were after the cod. They said once the bushfire went through that was the end of it, the end of the cod. They never got a cod after it.

For full oral history, see page 24.

A bushfire, followed by a storm event washing ash into waterways in the late 1920s, is associated with massive fish kills in the upland Abercrombie and Lachlan Rivers, after which cod were generally rare (Motum, OH 29; Flint, OH 32; Beer, OH 31; Burns, OH 27; Hanrahan, OH 25). A small recovery of cod occurred in the newly filled Wyangala Dam, but a second bushfire event in 1939 is reported to have eliminated the species from the area (Flint, OH 32).

Sydney Morning Herald, 25 July 1907

A POLLUTED STREAM

CARCOAR, Monday. Landowners living along the Belubula River between here and Blayney are complaining bitterly at the present state of the water, alleged to be caused through the mineral water from a copper mine being pumped into the stream. The copper, with which the water from the mine is impregnated, has coloured the stream blue, and fish in hundreds are floating dead on the surface.

The first weir in the catchment was built by miners at Junction Reefs on the Belubula River in 1897. More weirs were progressively constructed on the Lachlan River to divert water for agriculture. Construction of Wyangala Dam which commenced in 1928, and was completed in 1935, created a barrier to the upstream movement of native fish. It was reported that Golden Perch subsequently disappeared upstream of the dam (Lewis, OH 28; Dick Elvins, pers. com.). It has also been suggested that a decline in the number of Macquarie Perch and Trout Cod near Cowra has taken place after the commissioning of the dam, possibly due to restricted fish passage and changes to flows (Arthur Flint, pers. com.). The capacity of the reservoir was enlarged in 1971. A relic population of Macquarie Perch in the middle Belubula River disappeared after the construction of the Carcoar Dam in 1970. Reduced flows are again suspected as being responsible (Harrison, 1970 & pers. com.).

It is likely that Macquarie Perch were translocated to the upper Belubula River in the early 1880s (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 March 1886), and Murray River crayfish were introduced to the Canowindra area in 1915 (NSW Fisheries Report, 1915).

An unsuccessful attempt was made to introduce Australian Bass to the Crookwell River (NSW Fisheries Report, 1910–13). Redfin Perch, carp and Tench were introduced to the Lachlan catchment at Pinnacle Station near Forbes in 1885 (*Bathurst Free Press & Mining Journal*, 24 June 1885), and in 1885, Redfin Perch were stocked into a dam near Grenfell which was then used as a source to stock other waters in the catchment (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 September 1885; 5 September 1885; 3 December 1888). John Langtry reported that they appeared in large numbers near Hillston around 1940, and moved upstream reaching the Forbes area by about 1950 (Cadwallader, 1977). Some residents associated a decline in native fish numbers with the proliferation of Redfin Perch (Flint, OH 32; Roberts & Sainty, 1996).

Brown Trout were introduced near Taralga and Crookwell in 1892 (NSW Fisheries Reports, 1892; 1904). They were associated with the decline of cod and Blackfish in the Jerrong area in the early 20th century (McAlister, OH 23), and the rapid disappearance of Macquarie Perch and Blackfish in some small upland creeks near Wyangala during the mid 1950s (Elvins, OH 30; Beer, OH 31). The Boolarra strain of European Carp arrived in the Lachlan catchment during the 1970s. Many residents noted declines in native fish populations in the lower Lachlan after the arrival of European Carp, particularly Catfish. One resident reported the presence of thousands of small Catfish in the Lake Brewster Weir during the 1970s, but after carp arrived much of the aquatic weed disappeared, as did the Catfish (Roberts & Sainty, 1996). The arrival of European Carp in the 1970s in Wyangala Dam occurred after the local decline of Macquarie Perch populations,

OH 23

Peter McAllister of Golspie was interviewed in February 2008.

I think my father caught the last cod out of the Abercrombie, it was about 5 pound, he caught it out of what was known as the 'cod hole' about 5 miles as the crow flies below Bummaroo Ford, about 70 to 80 years ago. I'm almost 70, I started going fishing to the Abercrombie when I was about 6 or 8 years old and I didn't see it. The cod were through all the headwaters in all the spring creeks. Creeks like the Jerrong and the Wiaborough the old hands said there was plenty of cod in them; they got massive cod out of them. Eighty to 90 years ago every big hole had the cod in it, plenty of them. What they said was after the trout were put in the cod they disappeared.

And there was the blueys or slipperies they grew up to half a pound up in the headwaters, there was a lot of them up there too. In the Burra Creek it was nothing to catch half a sugar bag of blueys

but coincided with a rapid reduction in the Catfish and Silver Perch populations (Beer, OH 31; Elvins, OH 30).

The current situation

The *Sustainable Rivers Audit* concluded that 'the Lachlan Valley river ecosystem was in Very Poor Health'. Overall, it concluded that native fish populations in the Lachlan catchment were in 'Extremely Poor Condition' due to a 'loss of species richness, low abundance of native species and intrusions by alien species' and that 'most expected species were absent' (Davies et al., 2008).

Large native fish are very rare in the montane zone. There has been a major loss of biodiversity in the upland zone, with Trout Cod believed to be extinct. A small stocking took place in the Abercrombie River with a few captures subsequently taking place. Blackfish are

now scarce, and upland populations of Murray Cod and Golden Perch are supported by stocking in Wyangala Dam. The upland zone contains a population of Macquarie Perch of high conservation significance, primarily in the Abercrombie River with a diffuse population also present in the Lachlan River upstream of Wyangala. Redfin Perch appeared upstream of Wyangala Dam in 2005 after having been released into a farm pond, and these fish are now in abundance and posing a major threat to the Macquarie Perch population. Downstream of Wyangala Dam in the slopes and lowland zones, Macquarie Perch and Trout Cod are absent. While greatly reduced, populations of Murray Cod, Golden Perch, Silver Perch and Catfish still exist.

70 to 80 years ago, that was from the old hands. The bream they went fairly well all the way up and plenty of them. The bream, back 30 years ago there was still plenty of them in the Abercrombie up to 2 to 3 pound. The little streams when I was a kid I caught heaps of what I used to call the spotted and striped gudgeon, yeh that's the Purple Spotted Gudgeon. I haven't seen any in the streams for five years. There wasn't so many in the Abercrombie or the Burra Creek the trout used to clean them up. You'd get them in the creeks where there wasn't the trout. Like Monkey Creek it runs into the Burra, Flanagans Creek, and Golspie Creek; they were in their hundreds in the little creeks.

There was a few Catfish caught back about 40 years ago, they came up to the Bummaroo Ford for the one year, it was after Wyangala filled, not many, one was caught just below the ford and a few further down. The yellowbelly or the grunter I never heard of them caught up here, I think

it was just too cool for them. There used to be a lot of the white claw crayfish, they've disappeared since the carp came in. Going back 30 to 40 years I often got them fishing just on worms. As far as I know they were native to the area, the old hands talked about them. You could see them in the creeks, just their white claws which stood out; they went right up into the headwaters.

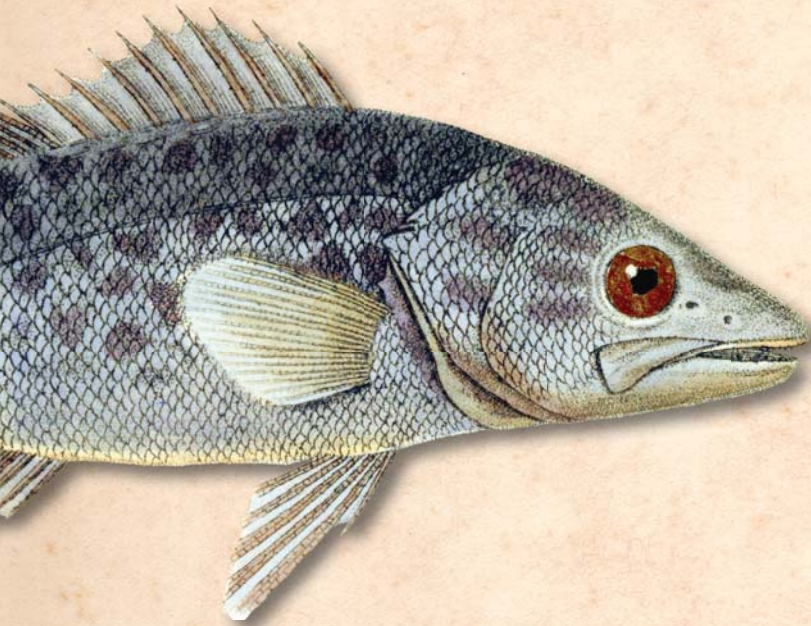
When they put the trout in the cod disappeared, that's what I was told, and the blueys disappeared from a lot of places too. The trout here didn't grow to much of a length, I used to go spinning and fly fishing; you could catch 40 or 50 of them in a day. I once got 13 in 13 casts with a spinner; it got caught on a rock on the 14th cast. I can remember if you went a day's fishing you'd catch that many trout, you'd give them all away for a bream. Then the carp came in, and we've had the drought, I've never before seen the Abercrombie stop running, it did last year.



Lachlan River

C A T C H M E N T

Newspapers



The following newspaper clippings are additional to those included in the text.

Sydney Morning Herald, 29 January 1866

THE LACHLAN

A remarkable phenomenon was produced by the first fresh in the river a short time ago. The water which was from the Belabula rivulet, was strongly impregnated with red clay, and its appearance in this part of the Lachlan, and I am informed as far as the fresh reached, was immediately followed by the sickening of thousands of fish, large numbers dying, and the rest becoming so helpless that they could be speared or caught by the hand without any trouble. In this manner hundreds were caught in the neighbourhood of the town, several specimens of the cod, weighing upwards of 40 lbs, and two between 50 lbs and 60 lbs, being brought to land out of a deep hole near the new bridge. Shrimps in myriads were also cast upon the sandy banks.

Sydney Morning Herald, 4 March 1886

CARCOAR, Wednesday. Some perch ova were put into the Belabula River about four years ago, having been brought from the Macquarie River. Several perch have lately been caught weighing from ½ lb. to 5 lb. each.

Photo opposite © MDBA.
Photographer Denise Fowler.

Sydney Morning Herald, 22 April 1871

CANOWINDRA

The river is at present flowing, a shallow stream of a uniform width of about 40 feet, and an average depth of 2 feet. Small fish abound, and the diggers may be found angling in places where the water is deep, in order to vary their eternal diet of bread and meat. Fish from ½ to 3 lbs are the reward of patience and suitable times—as the fish do not always bite freely.

Sydney Morning Herald, 9 January 1912

FOREST REEFS, Monday. During the holidays different spots on the Belubula afforded some fair sport, and Mr. G. Jarvis landed nine fine cod. Others of his party, not used to rod fishing, brought the total to sixteen, the largest weighing 4 lb.

Western Champion, 16 December 1915

Messrs. Sayers and Williams had a royal time amongst the fish in Bundaburra Creek last Thursday evening and night. On bamboo rods, the landed no less than 81 Catfish, averaging 2 lbs, and on a cross line secured a fine 45 lb. cod.

Western Champion, 25 April 1918

A fishing party at Bundaburrah Creek last Saturday secured five varieties of fish. They were Murray Cod, Golden Perch, Macquarie Perch, Catfish and river Blackfish (slippery).

Significant extracts from the annual reports of NSW State Fisheries

1907

Owing to the death of a number of fish in the Belubula River, in March, inquiries were made to ascertain the cause, and it was ascertained that the Copper Company were discharging the water from their old copper mine into the river, and that the fish were adversely affected by it.

1915

Permission was sought by the Canowindra Progress Association, to transport Murrumbidgee lobsters from the Tumut River to local waters. This was granted.

1910–13

Dissemination of Australian bass. / 1,020 yearlings were taken to Crookwell, and there liberated into 'holes' on the Crookwell River and Kiamma Creek.

1919

A visit of inspection was made to the Lower Lachlan River between Cargellico and Oxley, with a view to ascertaining the fishery there. It was found that the waters were very low, and fish were dying in large numbers. Subsequently, very heavy rain fell at and above Thelangerin, causing the river to flow from below Booligal to the reed beds, and the remainder of the fish in that area were saved.

1930

Worse than drought is the effect of the first freshet thereafter; the dry watercourses have been made the receptacle of all the fallen eucalyptus leaves and bark from the trees standing in the channel and on the banks from the excrement of stock which find shelter under the eucalypts from the summer sun; at times the accumulation is like a carpet, inches in depth.

A few years ago—at Booligal, the local police officer reported that he had employed a man with a horse and dray to remove great numbers of dead fish from the low weir there and cart them away—they had been destroyed in the manner described by the first small freshet after a drought, had drifted down with the current and accumulated against the weir. / This has been going on since the world began and will continue until doomsday, yet so great is the power of recovery of our fisheries that given good seasons within a couple of years the fishery is restored—by migration and by natural reproduction.



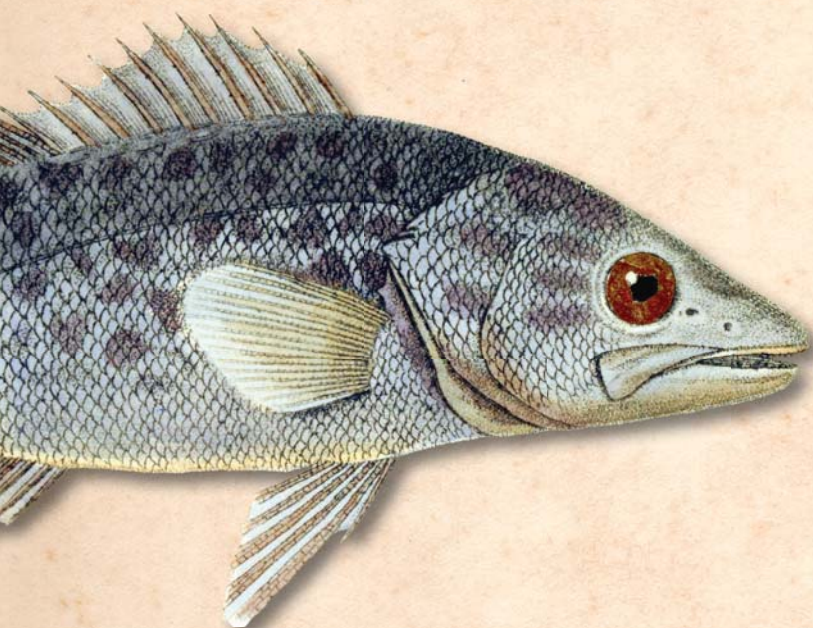
Phil Roberts with a 44 pound Murray Cod caught at the 'round a bout', Lachlan River, Reids Flat. Photo courtesy of Dick Elvins.



Lachlan River

C A T C H M E N T

Oral histories



The following oral histories (OH 22–36) mostly discuss the Lachlan River catchment.

OH 22

Noel Newman of Goulburn was interviewed in February 2008.

Jack Newman was my grandfather. In 1908 he took up some land on the south side of the Abercrombie River. It was just west of the Jerrong Road, and Long Swamp Creek ran through his property joining the river there. He named the property 'Long Swamp' for this reason. Jack's brother's land was closer to Taralga. Jack had two sons, Bill (who was my father) and Charlie. Charlie also took up land that joined Jack's property on the west so between them they had about 2 miles of continuous frontage to the Abercrombie on the south bank.

When the Newman family went to live at 'Long Swamp' in 1908 there were cod and Catfish coming up the Abercrombie as far as Long Swamp Creek, I was told that they did not go any further up than the junction even then. The cod were around 6 to 8 pounds, they were only small ones, I think they had already been in decline for a while and they slowly disappeared. Eventually a big fire went through and that probably finished them off, after a big bushfire there was always a big reduction in the fish population. My cousin John, who was Charlie's son, was born in 1935 and lived there for years, spent a lot of time fishing in the Abercrombie and he said there were no cod or Catfish in his time.

Photo opposite © MDBA.
Photographer Denise Fowler.

The trout and Macquarie Perch were plentiful in the upper reaches of the river, about a mile and a half above the Jerrong Road crossing is as far up as I have heard of the perch. They were generally called a black bream. The biggest bream would have been about 2½ pound, the average size about three quarters of a pound; they were very good to eat. The slipperies, sometimes called blueys, were in nearly every stream, right up to blazes, right up to the top. Upstream from Jerrong Road Crossing was where the Back Creek joined the river on the south side; Millamein Creek was a tributary of Back Creek. There were slipperies in those creeks.

Some good fishing places on the Abercrombie were known by name. Starting about a mile above the Back Creek junction there were the Black Holes also known as Wunnyallabay Holes, the Goose Hole near Jerrong Road crossing, then the Women's Fishing Hole, the Round Hole, Little Rocky Hole, McKenzie's Crossing, Eagle Hawk's Nest Hole and the Long Hole.



OH 23

Peter McAllister of Golspie was interviewed in February 2008.

See page 14.



OH 24

Les Croker of Golspie was interviewed in March 2007 at an age of 64 years.

They settled the property in 1882 that was my grandfather. My grandmother was born in 1865, about 1881 they set up a house at Pine Grove on Phil's River. My father was born in 1902, my grandfather died in 1927, I was born in 1944. I used to get all these stories from the past as bedtime stories. My family, they used to be keen fishermen, they'd fish the Abercrombie every two to three weeks through summer. Back then the river didn't have any of the rubbish in it like it has now. I was told that originally there was all big Oaks in the paddocks and along the river. You could walk right along the river. Today there is lots of small oaks and the rubbish like the blackberries, all since the big trees have gone.

They told some wonderful stories, a lot of the family members; they would go out fishing and stay the night. In this creek where we live today, the Boree or Burra Burra, they said the cod were that thick you could catch them by tying a hook on a stockwhip and using a bit of red flannel to catch them. The cod were in the Abercrombie, the Boree which was also known as the Burra Burra, they were particularly thick in that, there was no sand in there, just big rocks. There were cod in the lower parts of the Bolong. There was a wall or rock bar about 30 feet high on the Bolong, none of the native fish was caught above that. There was only trout above that. Years ago you could see the trout die in the Boree and the Bolong from the heat in summer. They would just go still in the holes and then they would just disappear. The Macquarie Perch, well they were the black bream here. They were so thick I was told you had a job to keep the bait away from those that were 3 to 4 inches long. They were caught up to about 3 pound or a bit better. Dad got one in the Abercrombie about 3 pound the last time he went out, that was in the early '70s.

My grandfather and a brother-in-law one day hooked into a good cod at Scrammy's waterholes, named after a man with a 'scrammy' or withered hand. They both held onto the line, it was a set line, to try to land this fish, but it broke away, he said it was as big as a pig. Another story was that one fellow got himself a cod, but it tied itself around a stump or tree. They found him some time latter all rotted with the jaw still with the line on the tree. The cod well I think they got quite a few around the 5 pound mark; the biggest one known was 25 pound out of the Big Hole in the Abercrombie. My father never said that yellowbelly had been caught here, there was the gudgeon, the black bream and the cod from the early 1900s up to the 1930s, and Catfish. On one occasion my father caught a 5 pound Catfish and my grandfather a 5 pound cod. Apparently there had been quite a few Catfish, they would come and go, but that was before I went out there. My grandfather put trout into Phil's River; I don't know what was in there before then. My dad's brother apparently was skinning rabbits out there and threw some legs in and these fish that were about 3 feet long and thin, well they ate them. They could have been cod.

I can remember my father, we went down to Francis' Crossing, but when I got bigger he brought me up here. There was a big hole; there was a big rock above Cameron's Hole, a wonderful spot for the Macquarie Perch. Up above there was Scrammy's Hole then Pete's Hut. One night we caught 27 Macquarie Perch, in Cameron's—that was in the early 1950s. They would have been from 10 to 14 inches long. The big hole by then was a disappointment, it had been cut in two, and it had silted up from the erosion. I was told that there had been plenty of cod and the Catfish out there, but the Macquarie Perch were still there. There was a fish like a gudgeon—the slimy—the slimeys are still out there, and I caught a few there with my son out there at Reedy Gully Hole about six years ago. In the old days the bait for the cod was the oak grub, out of the tree, and crayfish. The bait for the bream or Macquarie Perch was worms.

The cod were pretty well gone before the war, though there were odd ones around. There was a big hole in the Bolong, with a big cod in it. The trout were plentiful, and the bream, up till the 1960s. Back in those days there was such a flow in the Abercrombie you couldn't cross it in summer without getting wet. I think now it's gone 12 months without running. The only one that continually runs is Phil's River. In the Myanga Creek there's a lot of sand, it filled the Abercrombie, below the junction of the Bolong there's a lot of sand, up above there is a lot of gravel. Dad thought it was caused by all the rabbits. Every sheep dip when they started dipping sheep was built on a waterhole, all the arsenic drained into the river. I think that destroyed a lot of the fish. There was also a lot of rabbits poisoned with the phosphorus, I think that went down into the river too.

After reading Jack Rhodes' stories, which I found extremely interesting, I have this to add. Uncle George Smith and my grandfather William Croker that hooked onto the biggest cod ever seen in the Abercrombie were using a horse hair line (as mentioned in Jack's stories), and I heard uncle George make the remark that was the only fish he ever knew of to break a horse hair line. Also with reference to the 'up country swing' and a 'flight to the bank' uncle Johnny Weekes was the most notorious fisherman of this style—he tore the gills out of the first trout caught in the Abercrombie which then floated to the surface.

OH 25

Peter Hanrahan of Bathurst was interviewed in November 2007 at an age of 55 years.

See page 7.

OH 26

Veeny Stacey of Bathurst was interviewed in November 2007 at 94 years of age.

My father used to go fishing down to the Abercrombie; it was in the sulky days. I can remember the terrible fires out there in 1927, 1939. I was born in 1913, it was when I was a bit of a kid, I suppose I was 8 or 9 years old. You went down through Trunkey, down to the river. He used to catch them on worms; he would be digging for worms for a week before he went down. There was none of those modern lures to catch the fish then. They used to go out at Curragh that's one place they went, I'm sure, and they went out through Trunkey, it wasn't far to go.

He used to bring home a wheat bag full of the bream, they were a beautiful fish. My father used to salt the bream in the middle. I'm not really a fish eater but if someone put a bream in front of me now I would eat it, they were beautiful. They used to catch a few Catfish there, but nobody ate them. I never saw the Catfish, just heard about them. I think some people thought they were poisonous, but there was so many bream. The bream, well I suppose they were up to about 3 pounds, 2½ to 3 pounds I would say.

When we were kids I would go down with my brother and sisters, we would catch the gudgeon, in a creek called Burn's Creek, it started after Triangle Flat, it was a big creek, never went dry. We used to cook up the gudgeon, they were lovely. Sometimes they were much bigger, up about 6 inches long, they were a little bigger in some pools where there was less of them, they wouldn't have to fight over the food. I remember they had white bellies and I think a few spots down the side, they were in all the creeks around there. They weren't the blueguts I know about them, they were called a gudgeon. I hate worms so we didn't use them, we would catch them on a bit of meat, they would snap at anything.

OH 27

Wayne Burns of Triangle Flat was interviewed in November 2007 at an age of 58 years.

I'm 58, live at Triangle Flat. My father, they used to catch the cod and the bream, him and his brothers. They used to use the old cord lines and big old black hooks, I don't think they had eyes on them, they were just tied on. I can still remember them sitting in the buckets. Out through Trunkey, on the Abercrombie, near where the bridge is, that's where they used to fish. There's a camping area there now, we used to go out there. I can remember only catching trout, it was full of trout. Dad died in '73, and he was talking about the cod from a long time ago, it would be the '40s or earlier. I never saw the fish; he was talking about when he was young. I know they used to use the wood grubs.

Just thinking about what they said, the cod were about 5 to 10 pound; 10 pound was a big one. They said they used to catch the cod there, and they talked about the black bream. There was another fish out there, the slipperies, they mentioned them but they didn't fish for them, they were after the cod. They said once the bushfire went through that was the end of it, the end of the cod. They never got a cod after it.

OH 28

Joe Lewis of Narrawa was interviewed in December 2007 at an age of 67 years.

Well I'm 67 nearly; I was born near Crookwell but grew up down here at Moorabinda. I actually live in the district of Crookwell, Narrawa. We're only 4 to 5 k's from the Lachlan. My relatives probably arrived in the 1850s, they actually were dairy farmers, they came to Bevendale, south of here, then they spread further and further west. My father had the stories; he always used to say that at Easter time he wouldn't have to buy fish, he would just catch a fish, down the Lachlan here, always four to five cod and not much of anything else, that's what dad used to tell us. There was also what they used to call the old black bream; they used to call them white eyes here, now they call them Macquarie Perch, and the trout.

When I was about eight, I went with me brother fishing down to the river down from Moorabinda to a hole called Evan's Hole, it was on Jessmondeen. We got the humpy back—that was another common name for the Macquarie Perch, and goggle eyes I've heard of that, the ordinary silver bream or grunter and Rainbow Trout. We got so many fish we had to bring some ahead a mile or so and go back and get the second load. We did that all the way home, we made three stops. When we got home we got the biggest hiding—that was for going down the river by ourselves. The neighbours came and got what fish they wanted for Easter.

The rock cod and the green back—that was the old common names for the two types of cod here in the Lachlan. An uncle of mine, his father was a keen fisherman. He said there was a distinct difference in the types of cod. What I remember they mostly talked about was the pointy nose, they were spotty, and they always said that most of the cod they caught in the early days were the spotty ones. I particularly remember a couple of uncles over at Taralga and they used to talk about the rock cod. They said they used to get a few rock cod and also said that they used to get the odd greenback, over at Taralga. They always used to talk about the white eye; they caught a lot of them, a lot of trout, mostly rainbows, and the yellowbelly. They used to get the old silver bream, but they weren't really plentiful there. The cod you might get one each trip, if you were lucky, only small stuff, anything from 2 pound to 6 to 8 pound. That's what they said. The stories I heard are going back to the 1920s. To me they were just all cod; I can't be sure what type I was catching.

In my lifetime, what I remember of them, the cod never went much past Reidsdale, but the old stories were that Reidsdale was one of the best cod areas around here. There was deep water, but it's all silted up now. I can remember the cod in the Lachlan; we used to catch some at Jessmondeen, from there up to Reidsdale, just upstream from the Lachlan Bridge. We caught quite a number, they were not real big, they were around 30 pound. I remember in 1952 I seen one hooked up on a fence post in the '52 flood, he was over a 100 pound. There was a photo taken of it. The last I remember they were big and fat, that was the tail end of them. Never caught little ones out of the Lachlan yet. I wouldn't say they weren't common when I fished. Probably

around the '50s was when we were getting them. My uncle got one in 1958; he was about 17 pound, that was the last one I saw.

The Crookwell River was one of the best bream spots around; we used to go down there as kids. Moorabinda, the Kensits owned it, we used to go down there with a little Stringybark rod and 6 foot of line, we'd catch six to eight bream and they'd be good ones, 2 to 3 pounds. That's the Macquarie Perch. The bream used to go nearly all the way to Crookwell, there was a bit of a fall just below the town, they were certainly caught there. In the Lachlan the Macquaries were caught all the way up, certainly at the Poplar Hole, that's where the Narrawa Creek comes in. They used to be up in the Jerrewa Creek, that's actually Spring Creek, the last I remember them there was the late '60s.

The Catfish, my dad said, he said there was only odd ones here early on, they didn't come here in any numbers till the 1950s. The Catfish they used to come right through from Forbes, and the yellowbelly, they used to get an odd one, very, very early on. With the old dam they could get round it in a big flood. I've never caught a Catfish further up than Reidsdale, they preferred the muddy holes. Above Reidsdale there was a fairly steep rapid. Yellowbelly, again very odd ones, grunter or silver bream, yes there was quite a few of them here, they went all the way up too, you could catch them anywhere there was a sandy bank. The bluegut was always plentiful. Every creek, they were just about everywhere, they were very plentiful. The Rainbow Trout was the most common, right through, and the old hands used to be saying they used to catch a lot in the depression era. Not a lot of browns. The trout, they more or less stopped above Reids Flat. It was after the '56 flood that a lot was caught further down, a lot of browns.

The smaller fish, well there was the smelt, and gudgeons, three types of them. One was the purple spot, there's still odd colonies of them around here in the small creeks. One place is the Burrawinda Creek. I've seen them there 6 to 8 inches long; they're big ones, with a lot 4 to 5 inches long, some 2 to 3 inches. The other gudgeons were nearly clear and a lot smaller, 50 mm would pull them up. In 1980/81 I caught two fish which I think were perchlets, just down here. Got them under a float on worms, never seen them before. I suppose they were about 8 inches long, they were a transparent blue colour, with a

bit of a pink background in them. That was down in Evan's Hole. I read later about a new perchlet they discovered over at Hillston, so it might have been them.

The Macquarie Perch started to drop off in the '60s and by the time the big fire had come through in '75 they had disappeared in most areas. The bluegut disappeared too. In the Lost River, it runs into the Lachlan, there's still blueguts in it, odd ones. I know of two that were caught in it a while back. From the '60s onwards we had quite a few droughts. The first carp that I know from around here was in 1968. When I was young the river was deep, clear, there was no debris in it, a lot of it was rock out in the deep water, and sand on the bends. The changes have happened a lot since the early '70s; I put it down to the drought of '65. There was grass about, then there was a lot of heavy rain, washed all the topsoil off. Sandbanks appeared in certain holes, and every year they've increased, going up the river all the time. It used to a nice clean green colour and now it's murky all the time. The local people have been fencing the banks off in places and there's natural regrowth. From what I've seen the changes have made a fairly big difference, and I think the government should help them more. Where the stock have been kept out when it rains the sand gets scoured out and doesn't work its way back in again.

OH 29

Mrs Mona Motum of Tanilba Bay was interviewed in February 2007 at an age of nearly 92 years.

I'll be 92 in September; I grew up at Reids Flat, on the Lachlan River. My father come from around Bigga, my mother herself was from Reids Flat, so we were all from around there. When I was young we fished and caught nice fish, we always had nice fish, there was plenty of fish in the Lachlan. I remember mum said one afternoon to us kids, that we were going down to the river fishing, I was about 6 or 7 years old. There were no rods or reels; we just had a pine fishing rod with a cord, float, sinker and a hook. We went over to the river, we sat down and fished where there were three logs and put worms on the hook. In no time we had three beautiful cod, they were about 2 to 3 pound. We went back home then, that was enough for us, there were no refrigerators back then to keep them.

The three cod that we caught were the streamlined cod. We used to catch two types of cod, the streamlined cod and the stumpy cod, but really they were all cod to me. The streamlined cod were more common than the stumpy ones, they had a pointy head and it wasn't as big or flat like the head of the stumpy ones. They were different in colour too, though it's been years since I have seen one. The streamlined cod they were a grey sort of colour, while the fat ones were a darker colour and green. And the streamlined ones didn't have the fat in them like the stumpy ones, they were better to eat. But really both were beautiful to eat. With the fat ones my mother would fry them, then cook them in the oven over a pan, that took all the fat out of them.

Most of the cod were a nice size to eat, though some of the cod were bigger. After a flood, at the racecourse above the bridge, the flood used to wash them out onto the racecourse. My father and uncle used to pick them up and put them back in the river, there were some mighty ones they put back. They looked after the cod; we only took what we needed. But then there was a bad fire, it nearly burnt us out, they stopped it at Bakers Creek, it happened well before the war. And before that there were two blokes who were dynamiting the river. The cod used to float up for days after, we couldn't stand the smell, it cleaned out a lot of the fish. After that there were very few cod seen out of the river.

Apart from the cod we used to get at Reids Flat the yellowbelly, they were a good size, and the bream, they were a good size too. One fish was a feed. The bream were a lot more common, they used to swim around in schools, you could sit on the bank and watch them. The bluebellies, you could catch them all the time. A cousin of mine, Bill Norris, he was like my brother to me and I was like a sister to him. He used to catch them, they'd be 6 to 8 inches long, little slimy things, they were called slipperies too. They were as common as can be, you'd get three to four every time, then they disappeared overnight. It was the same further up the river, on the farm up at Battery Crossing, a few miles above Reids Flat. There were the same sorts of fish; it was no bother catching them, bream, yellowbelly, bluebellies and both cods.

In Wyangala Dam there was plenty of cod, bream and yellowbelly when I was young. There was grunter too, oh yes, they were in Wyangala, in the dam you didn't have any trouble catching them, but I never saw one

in the river at Reids Flat. And the Catfish, you could catch them easy. I remember one day later on we went down to Wyangala, my husband and I, and we weren't catching anything. It got dark and we had our lines out. I shone a torch and they were right in front of us where we were fishing, not out where we had our lines. We threw out our lines in front of us and we caught a lot. I don't remember catching one at Reids Flat.

After the fires and the dynamiting I used to go down the river once a week with handlines and worms, by then there was only bream. When I became a teenager I left Reids Flat, went to Sydney. You could still catch a bream, over 20 years ago. Then they put the trout in and they started to die out. I haven't been back permanently to the area and I don't go back today. It's not the same place.

OH 30

Dick Elvins of Lemon Tree Passage was interviewed in February 2007 at an age of 62 years.

The cod in the upper Lachlan, that is from the top end of Wyangala Dam and up, were something of a mystery. I can recall as far back as 1952. There were a lot of tales around about the cod that used to be caught in the river in previous years. Some of these were caught by my grandfather, his sons and daughters, one of which is my mother who is alive today at the age of 92 and has clear recollections of the fish that inhabited the river system.

My grandfather had a property on the Lachlan above Reids Flat, he had about 20 odd miles of river front, I didn't live far from him. His main residence though was at Reids Flat. He and my uncles used to come home on weekends if it wasn't flooded. He used to talk about how in the past how he used to catch there Catfish, yellowbelly, Murray Cod, the Macquarie Perch and the blueguts or slimeys. He said he used to be able to catch a cod or a yellowbelly anytime. His best cod was 80 pound, though he got plenty over 40 and lots of smaller ones. My grandfather used to take me fishing a lot in my younger years; he used to live about half a mile from the river. We used to walk along the Lachlan and he used to show me the holes where he used to get the cod. He would take

his pole with a line attached, pole usually being about a 10 to 12 foot long Stringybark sapling, with a line the same length and a cork on the line. It used to astound me how he could tell the difference of a bite from a shrimp to the bite of a Macquarie Perch or black bream as we called them.

We would sit on the bank at the Reedy Hole and while he fished he would tell me about the fish he used to catch there. The cod were in plentiful supply back then. He would and had caught them up to 80 pounds; the biggest was caught just above where we were fishing. Back then and until just recently we all thought they were Murray Cod, but when I think about it both he and my mother said that the long thin cod were better eating the short fatter ones. Obviously the thinner ones could have been Trout Cod. The first time I had heard of the Trout Cod was back in the late '50s when me, my father, grandfather and uncles were fishing in Burrinjuck Dam and my father caught a cod of about 30 pounds. It fought and looked a bit different from the other cod, that was in late '58 or '59. My grandfather knew all about the Trout Cod or bluenose. He said it was a Trout Cod and was great eating as they were not as fatty, but said they liked the faster flowing water, to live in. And they go a lot harder than the normal Murray Cod. Mum told me that after the big floods my grandfather and his brothers would go along the river and get all the big cod caught in the gilguys and billabongs and return them to the river. She said it was silly trying to keep them because they had no refrigeration and the fish would go bad.

I have not fished in the Abercrombie as I have the Lachlan. I do know that the black bream used to be more prevalent there than the other streams, that was because it was a faster flowing river with plenty of rocky holes. Back in the gold rush days around Tuena most of the miners lived on rabbits and fish. From what my grandfather said his brother, who was on the goldfields, said that there was good cod and bream in the river. I do know that back in the late '40s and early '50s, even as late as the '60s they used to get bream in Tuena Creek, but I think it only has trout in it now. The old blokes talked about the cod and Silver Perch being common up from Bathurst in the early years. And the top of the 'bidgee, they used to get cod up from Canberra. My grandfather had a mate that used to fish the 'bidgee up from there for cod.

Anyway back to the type of fish that were caught in the river system. There was no shortage of black bream, cod, slipperies, Crucian Carp and Catfish. I can recall my grandfather coming home one afternoon in the mid-'60s and telling us that he was astounded. While he was fishing down at a hole known as the Green Bank that afternoon, he walked onto the top of the bank and there were three yellowbelly sunning themselves on the surface. He swore that they had to be over 30 pounds each. So my father and I went down about a week later to see if we could catch one. We were using yabbies and worms and we set four handlines along the bank one of which was beside a log about 20 feet from us, as we were bobbing with worms. As we were sitting there we heard a whack near the log. We went there and the line had been shattered. The lines were all 45 pound breaking strain that was because my father always said you never know what you are going to hook when fishing. But I don't think it was a yellowbelly that broke it.

In the early '50s in the afternoon you could go down to the river and catch half a dozen Macquaries, not a problem, that would be our fish for the week. We used to get them up to 3, 3½ pound. And the Catfish, well the dam was full of them, but you would get one occasionally, up to about 3 pound, maybe one every six month at Reids Flat. Another good place to fish was Taylors Creek as we knew it, above Reids Flat, but its real name was Kallaba Creek. It was the home of the black bream and was one of our favourite creeks for Maccas, the holes were 7 to 8 feet deep, in between the rapids, they were in all the creeks as well as the river. You could look in the holes and see the Macquarie Perch, mum, dad, and all the kids swimming around the hole. My father and mother used to take us fishing there when we were kids. It was quite common to catch anything up to a dozen bream.

It would have been in the late '70s when my cousin Phillip Roberts and myself were at the hole above Green Bank known as the Pumpkin Paddock. We had been shooting ducks further up the river and came back to the car to pluck them. As we sat on the bank of the river there was an almighty splash and bang under a willow tree on the other side. This poor old wood duck came out honking, feathers going everywhere and had an injured wing and could not fly. Although she could see us she preferred to be over our side as over there. A couple of minutes later as

we were watching the willow a cod swam out from under it. You could actually see his fin sticking out of the water; he would have to have been well over a metre in length. He swam about half way across and then disappeared, that was the first one I had actually seen there.

I often fished the Reedy Hole and Supples, but it was such a long walk from my grandfather's farm house, but I still used to do it. It was about 6 or 7 k's to Reedy Hole from the farm house. Supples and Hogans holes were another of my grandfather's favourite fishing holes as well as my own. He used to catch cod and bream, but all I caught was trout and the occasional bream. One of the best streams for bream was used to be Mulgowrie Creek. We used to walk up above Rosewood Station and watch the bream swimming around in the rocky holes, but we never ever caught any as we thought it was probably the only stronghold they had left. As far as I know they should still be there, unless someone has got them. The only thing I used to take out of there was the bloody trout. It is probably full of European Carp by now which is a shame. They, like the trout, have caused a lot of damage to our native species. Take the bluegut or slippery for instance, the last one of those I caught was in '58 or '59. I blame the trout for their demise. They were there like the bream before the trout but did not last long after they arrived.

There were other creeks around that contained good stocks of bream in those days, such as Bramah Creek, Mulgowrie Creek and the Crookwell River. I don't know much about the Crookwell River as it was a bit past my fishing grounds. But I fished the Lachlan from Wyangala Dam to what we know as Sounding Rock just below the entrance of the Crookwell River. The only time that I have fished above Sounding Rock was once with my grandfather and uncle. We were fishing up above the junction of the Crookwell River at a place called Fords Crossing above Koala Station towards Rugby. That would have been in the late '50s or early '60s. We had gone there to catch bream; it was beautiful water, deep with lots of logs. That night we heard four big wallops, my grandfather told me it was a cod feeding. He and my uncles always said that they thought that there was still cod at the Sounding Rock, at that time parts of the hole were very deep and so was the deep hole just below it.

Another river known as the Boorowa River used to hold yellowbelly and cod back in the '50s. I can recall once when my father and a farmer who lived at Frogmore, he owned the land around Roaring Rock which is a series of deep granite holes. I was only about 8 or 9 years old when we went up there for the weekend, mum and us kids stayed at the house for the weekend. Saturday night dad and Eric came home from down at the river and had half a dozen nice yellowbelly, the biggest being around 8 pounds. Next morning they went around their lines and came back with a few more yellowbelly and two bream. Dad was saying that they had two lines broken through the night. As I said before my father never fished lighter than 45 pound line. After that time it was only good for trout fishing further up.

Wyangala Dam has gone through several stages. Back in the '50s and '60s it was full of Catfish and bream. We used to call them white eyes or pygmy bream, but they were actually baby Maccas. Then, when the trout and the carp built up numbers, they disappeared. Gone from can't keep a bait on because of small Catfish and bream, to not losing a bait, or catch a carp. On one occasion while they were working on raising the wall at Wyangala I recall watching with a couple of workmates a very large cod which used to patrol one certain stretch of a bay every day about the same time. He did this for about three days and then we did not see him anymore. He would have been 80 pounds or more, that was back about '63 or '64. So there was obviously still some cod still around in the dam. But they were obviously not breeding or if they were they were not surviving. I do recall that the Bigga Fishing Club along with the fisheries stocked it with big cod caught at Burrinjuck; it was in the late '70s I think. Just how many I am not sure.

The only time I caught a cod from the Lachlan was back in 1982 when I landed a 56 pound fish where the river met the backwater of the dam. At that stage there were no carp in the system. I went back four months later and I caught a European Carp in the river just above the headwaters of the dam at what we called George Smith's and it weighed in at 16 pounds and was full of roe. Twelve months later the system was full of carp. The last cod caught in the river to my knowledge was caught just below Reids Flat by my cousin Phillip Roberts. Since then my cousin has found three breeding pairs above that and protects them. He has vowed never to keep another big fish after that one. He also told me that

one of Tony Taylor's sons was spinning for trout just below the bridge last year and a couple of cod around 20 pound followed his celta [fishing lure] in.

The tales told and from some of my experiences seems to lead to the fact that a lot of the demise of the bulk of the fish types in the upper Lachlan and for that matter the Abercrombie was caused mainly by bushfires and man himself along with trout and European Carp. My mother told me that there were thousands of fish killed and left to rot by indiscriminate dynamiting of the holes in the rivers, the bulk of it by two men in particular. She said for weeks after they did it you could not get near the river because of the stink of dead fish. These holes would have taken years to rehabilitate.

Grandfather told me there was a massive fire in the upper Lachlan in the late '30s or early '40s; it started over near Rugby and burnt across through to Crookwell before they got it under control. About a week later it rained and brought in all the ash into the river, then it flooded. He told me the floods washed all of the bodies away, the cod were getting washed up and hung up on the fence at the old Reids Flat racecourse. The fire pretty well wiped the cod out, though I may have heard of odd ones around there, maybe up to the '60s, but I never saw one myself. My grandfather thought that some had survived, in the creeks above where the fire went through. I remember we were fishing one night, up above Rugby, and there were four big wallops, my grandfather told me that it was a cod feeding, that was back in the early '60s. The Macquaries and the blueguts had survived in some of the creeks away from the fire, and they later came back.

The trout first hit Reids Flat about '55/56, they were a bit like the European Carp today; they had just been put in. They went up every creek, every pot hole, they grew fantastic. Well that was the end for the other fish. I can remember the first time I caught a Rainbow Trout, I was 12 years old. We went to Taylor's Creek fishing for bream and we ended up catching about 30 "bloody trout" as my father said. He said it would be the end of the fishing there, and he was right. I fished that stream for several years after and only caught one bream, while I must have caught 200 trout. Gone were the days of watching the bream swim around. It was amazing to watch how they swam around as a family group. I sat and watched one group for two hours one day and it was amazing

how mum and dad herded the troupe up. One little hint of danger and the little ones would dive under the bank, then mum and dad would come out, swim around, and if all clear out would come the littlies and either mum or dad at the rear. I actually saw one of the old ones catch a shrimp and break it up. All the little ones came around and feasted on the scraps. Alas gone are those days.

And the same with the blueguts, I was told they used to be really common, that they were a great bait for the cod. We used to still get them when we were kids, a few a month, then the trout picked them off. The blueguts have been wiped out for years, since the late '50s, the last one I saw would have been in '58 or '59. I know there still are a few Macquaries in the Abercrombie but the only place I've seen them doing well in recent times is in Cataract, and the Silver Perch there's heaps of them in there, as well as Murray Cod and Trout Cod. The native fish have got it all to themselves in Cataract, there's no trout, redfin or carp and they're doing really well. That's how it should be.



OH 31

Eric 'Sugar' Beer of Wyangala Dam was interviewed in January 2007 at an age of 70 years.

I was reared on the upper Lachlan; the old people called it the Fish River. There was two stories I was told about the cod in the river here, up above the dam. A big bushfire went through, before my time, above Rugby. They reckon there was that much charcoal washed in the river, well the gases killed them. The other theory was that they got a gill bug, and that killed them. When that happened, what killed them, they said you could nearly walk across the river on the cod. They told me that when I was a kid, 60 years ago. There was supposed to have been cod in the Abercrombie, there had to have been. The first cod I saw up here was 49 pounds, out of Wyangala, in the old dam. They finished the dam in '32 or '33, and I was 10 or 12 years old when I saw the cod. The dam was increased in the '60s. I didn't see another cod until they stocked them. The Bigga Fishing Club put them in, and then the Wyangala Club put more in, I was the President of the Wyangala Club. The Bigga Club went to Burrinjuck and netted some cod, they had

permission, and brought them back, that was the early to mid-'70s. Then we bought fingerlings over from Narrandera, not long after.

I used to catch a lot of Macquaries over at Reids Flat, they were still up there till about '55, though not that many by then, they were starting to reduce in number. The Macquarie Perch, my stepfather used to catch the buggers there, plenty, from ¾ to 1½ pound. Anything bigger was exceptional. I blame the trout for wiping the Macquaries out. They put the trout in, well within a couple of years you could see the change, the Macquaries got real scarce. We still get an odd little Macquarie in the Abercrombie Arm of the lake. Speaking for myself, before the trout, Macquarie Perch were the dominant fish, and the freshwater Blackfish which we called the 'blueguts'.

The last I seen of the Blackfish was in the creeks up near Rugby, they were common, they called them 'sprats' up there. Those creeks, they had stacks of them, 8 to 9 inches long, I was 15 to 16 at the time. You are looking at about 1952. They were apparently the ideal cod bait up there; they told me in the old days you had to stand behind a tree when you put them on the hook! I don't know of them up there now. I heard of one from below the dam, I didn't see it but it was positively identified, would have been over 20 years ago.

There used to be nice little holes at Reids Flat, 300 to 400 yards long, 6 to 8 feet deep, that's when the river was low. And then the '50 and '52 floods virtually levelled it, two whopping floods. I didn't see a redfin until I got out to Bland Creek, that was my first, near West Wyalong. I've never seen one above the dam, heard of them but seen no proof, but there used to be plenty of them below the wall.



OH 32

Arthur (Tibby) Flint of Cowra was interviewed in January 2008 at an age of 82 years.

I will be 82 this year. I'm only a boy really and still go to work on the farm which is 14 kilometres up the Lachlan River from town. When I was very young I can remember a section of the river, about 3 kilometres up from the town, being a very popular fishing spot. This was known as the second sand bank, and swimming carnivals were also held there.

My father, friends old Digger Wright, Bill Slattery and many other fishermen they would line up on Sundays, sometimes on a Saturday, with their Rangoon cane poles and a tin of worms. There would be a line of fishermen for about 3 kilometres and they would mostly all finish up catching fish. They caught cod, slipperies, and yellowbelly which were common.

My father-in-law, Bill Byrnes, used to fish the 'narrow gutted hole', right where they built the dam. There were very many small cod in the river at that time. The first time I caught a Macquarie Perch was above Wyangala. I have also caught them in the Lachlan above the second sand banks. Their size would have been approximately 1½ to 2 pounds. They were certainly caught in the river near Cowra, but not in abundance. They were not as common as the yellowbelly, small bream or grunter. I haven't known of any here in the last 25 years, but I haven't fished this portion of the river much for many years.

Catfish were very common here, but they were more plentiful about 25 kilometres up the river. We caught them mainly at night with worms. A good sized one would have been about 2 pounds. During the last 40 years I've fished mainly in Wyangala Dam and the river below and caught Catfish in both areas. Yellowbelly weighing a pound to a pound-and-a-half were also caught there. I have seen some good ones, the biggest being about 12 pounds. Seven to 8 pound cod were caught by the old blokes especially after a fresh in the river. The cod went right up the Lachlan.

I knew there were two types of cod. The old blokes had names for them, but I can't remember what they were. They couldn't understand why they were different. To my knowledge they only caught a few of the other type, odd ones at Cowra, but they caught both types in the river above Wyangala Dam. The grey ones had a beak or a hooked nose on them, and they were common in that area. Macquarie Perch were also common up there too, in the Abercrombie, around Tuena. They also caught some Murray Cod, but more of the other, that's what the old blokes used to say. The old blokes used to talk about how it was before the fires. The fires wiped them out for many, many years. An old bloke at Reids Flat told me how the fire went through, and a storm washed the ash in. This killed thousands of fish which were washed up on the bank. I am not sure of the exact time of the fires, I'd say it was in the '20s, it was well before 1939 and it specifically wiped out the cod in the rivers.

In the late 1920s, early '30s, they built the first Wyangala Dam. I can remember my father and mother going to hospital to visit a relative. He was one of my mother's brothers. He died eight days after being caught in a concrete mixer while working on the dam. I fished the dam in the late '30s and I've seen it down to the river bed. In the first dam there were cod, grunter, slipperies, yellowbelly, bream and Catfish. They caught a lot of Catfish but more cod than anything. A lot of people wouldn't eat them, the Catfish but they were beautiful. The bream and the Macquarie Perch was the best eating. Cod has always been too fatty for me.

The dam has changed a lot. In the 1940s there weren't many cod or yellowbelly being caught in the dam. A few bream and Macquarie Perch were being caught in the 1950s. After the trout came in there were no other native fish other than the Catfish and grunters. My father-in-law ran a few competitions for the Lions Club in the late '50s. Mainly trout and Catfish were caught. I remember the last time he ran one the new wall was under construction. Redfin came into the Lachlan after a big flood in the 1950s. They were plentiful for about 10 years. They did well until the carp arrived.

In the '60s we stocked the dam with yellowbelly, we brought over from Bland Creek. It was done by the Cowra Angling Club who and supervised by the Fisheries Department. It was done over two weekends, on one occasion 300 went in. In the '70s cod were brought over from Burrinjuck, then fingerlings from Narrandera. Below the dam the river has changed, it's silted up; towards the town part it's really silted.

OH 33

John Bryan of Cowra was interviewed in January 2007 at an age of 79 years.

My father owned 'Glenogen', about 7 miles out of Cowra and I was up at Bennet Springs 40 years ago. I have never seen one, a cod, out of the Lachlan at Cowra. They were here over 80 years ago, my father caught a big cod, dragged it onto a sandbank about 1910. I remember him telling me how this cod was gasping and the boys were frightened by the mouth! He said they used to catch Yellowbelly, grunter. There's always been a fair bit of yellowbelly about.

OH 34

Neil Cambell of Canowindra was interviewed in February 2008 at an age of 70 years.

I'm 70, and yes I did have some Macquarie Perch in my dam years ago, they came from over at Wyangala. I also had some yellowbelly in the dam; they grew to a fair size. The Macquarie Perch they might have got to a pound, pound-and-a-half, that was back in the mid-'60s. I can remember my father and the old blokes used to talk about the good cod fishing there used to be up in the top of the Lachlan before the big bushfires. In the Lachlan near here the Macquarie Perch there was the odd one caught below Cowra. There used to be a lot of cod, Grove Craven and my father used to get a lot.

In the Belubula I can go back to the mid-'60s and at that time there was a lot of rainbow trout in it. A mate and I we once walked down about a mile and a half below the bridge and we caught 11 Rainbow Trout plus all those that got away—we were burying them in the sand as we went. I've caught years ago Golden Perch, the odd one in it, not far from the Lachlan. And I did catch a couple of cod, they were coming up out of the Lachlan, one was 8 to 9 pound.

There was a couple of blokes here that caught a couple of Trout Cod, between Cowra and Forbes but I'd say closer to Forbes as I remember. It was a long time ago, in the '60s, no later than about 1970. They were not very big, only a couple of pound, they weren't sure what they were, they brought them back to get them identified, but one of the blokes at the time said he thought they might have been Trout Cod and that's what they were identified as. That's what they were and they're the only ones I've ever seen out of the Lachlan.

OH 35

Grove Craven of Canowindra was interviewed in February 2008.

The Macquarie Perch: many years ago we went up to Wyangala just after it opened and we used to catch them up there; we called them the pygmy perch. I can't recall catching them in the Lachlan; we used to do a lot of fishing down below Euabalong, in the lower reaches round Lake Cargellico. The main fish there were the old yellowbelly or Golden Perch, the odd Silver Perch and the Murray Cod. There were some good Golden Perch down there, but no Macquarie Perch. There was plenty of Catfish in the lower Lachlan, and there was times when Wyangala was full of them. My old man was a keen old fisherman, he'd always fish for big fish, and he'd use frogs and sparrows for the cod. We got an invitation to go to Euabalong and dad got a 45 pounder and his mate an 18 pounder. On that trip down there, that was my first trip there, the bream were breaking my light lines, and the yellowbelly.

In the Belubula, well the only fish that did any good there was the Rainbow Trout and that was only in some years that were suitable, when it was cooler. The Belubula hasn't reached the Lachlan now for months, and in the past it was only in good years that you could fish it. The Lachlan near here wasn't too bad, but there was too much fishing going on, you had to go below Condobolin to get good fishing. The buggers all had traps in; I was a fisheries inspector for seven to eight years. I once asked one old Aboriginal bloke about why they got so many big cod in their traps. He told me they used to put a bag over the top of it and the cod thinking it was a log would move into it. There was a time when I was a teenager and you'd catch a few of the smaller cod in the Lachlan near here. We also used to catch the slipperies, we'd catch them under a float with worms, and they were commonly about 6 inches long, they were very sweet to eat. That's about 13 mile from Canowindra, they were common for a time, the last time I saw one would have been 10 or 15 years ago.

Our great fishing places were Wyangala and Burrinjuck. Burrinjuck was originally terrific for cod; we could always catch six to eight cod there in the '40s. The first time I ever fished it was in 1932 and

from that trip I'm the only bloke left alive, I'm 95¼ years. We went there and there was two blokes that really knew how to fish for them, they were bushrangers! There was a lot of cod, and the Silver Perch and some of the Macquarie or pygmy perch. In particular the Macquarie Perch there was a lot of them in the upper reaches of the dam and up the rivers. That was the bushranger days; some blokes would have a mile of crosslines. That was the last year you could actually use net, they were still legal. I can tell you one place where I struck the Macquarie Perch. We struck them this one day over in the Goodradigbee, beautiful fish, three quarters of a pound to a pound; I think I caught them on worms. They are beautiful to eat though I think the old cod takes some beating.

With the droughts, well the worst one was the terrible drought in 1944, the river nearly went dry. The following year there was 52 inches of rain, it tore the wonderful lucerne paddocks we had apart, at one stage we got 11 inches in a week.

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Tom Cussack of Wellington was interviewed in May 2008 at an age of 82 years.

I'm 82, grew up in Parkes. Joycee, that's the wife, we've been fishing the Lachlan, the Macquarie and the Darling for a long time. The brother-in-law, Robert Smith, they'd come with us. Fifty years ago I used to fish the Lachlan, past Condobolin at a place called the Blackfella's Monument. We used to get a lot of yellowbelly there, and Murray Cod. We also used to get a lot of Catfish and the grunter too. When the carp came about they ate up all the weeds, and you saw the change. The yellowbelly it would be nothing to get 4 to 5 pounders, the biggest we caught was at Euabalong, 14 pound was the biggest. The wife got two in one day 14 pound. The biggest cod I ever got was 61 pound dressed, it was a female. We used to throw the big males back because they look after the young. Others threw the females back, but we threw the males back because they're important. We used to keep the cod at about 10 to 14 pound, but we got a lot around 2 to 4 pound. I remember I once put a line out with milky worms and there was a cod on it about three quarters of a pound. When I pulled the line in a bigger one about 4 pound had grabbed him, I knew because he had the smaller one in him.

The grunter were mostly a pound, pound and a quarter, and the Catfish were up to 6 pound. I never ever saw a Trout Cod there, in the Lachlan, though there is a few here now in Wellington. I never ran into Macquarie Perch there either.

We used to fish in the Macquarie; we used to go up to Carter's property near Warren. It was pretty well the same there; we got yellowbelly, Catfish, cod, the whole works. And the Silver Perch I remember we used to get them up to 3 pound back in the 1950s. We were up near Warren, three to four years ago, we used to go fishing up there a lot. There was a dead cow near the river, and I said to the wife that we'll camp here, she wasn't too happy about it. We fished there for a day and got a couple of small ones. Next day it rained and I had a cod line with two sets of yellowbelly heads. Wayne, the number one son, went around the lines. I straddled two logs and brought him up, he was a 43 pound cod and he wasn't even hooked. Many years ago the Lachlan was good and the Macquarie was good too. We were down at a place called Waroo, down towards Condobolin. Joyce threw the first line in and got a 4 pound yellowbelly straight away. We never saw another fish for a couple of days. That's what they were like sometimes. The yellowbelly we got mainly on milky worms and yabbies and the big cod I've caught mainly on yellowbelly heads and guts. The Catfish and Silver Perch we mainly got on worms.



Annotations and sketches of a cod head, possibly a Trout Cod, drawn by Ludwig Becker, 26/7/1858. Courtesy of the Museum of Victoria.

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Lachlan River

This booklet is one in a series based on the “True Tales of the Trout Cod: River Histories of the Murray–Darling Basin” a book written by Will Trueman. They combine oral history and science to investigate the changes to native fish populations in parts of the Basin and have a particular focus on the Trout Cod, a fish that is intriguing to many and has little known about it.

Will combines his piscatorial knowledge with stories, science, newspaper articles, fishing records and historic photographs to produce a beautifully written insight into the rivers, fish and people of the Murray–Darling Basin.

Further information about these booklets, the complete book and related videos can be found at www.arcc.com.au/mdb/troutcod



Mum told me that after the big floods my grandfather and his brothers would go along the river and get all the big cod caught in the gilguys and billabongs and return them to the river.

Dick Elvins, Lemon Tree Passage, February 2007