



MEDIA RELEASE

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Climate impacts on Basin native fish to be studied

A study on the impact of climate change on native fish will boost the Murray-Darling Basin Commission's (MDBC) already successful range of fish programs.

Chief Executive Dr Wendy Craik said today the study would focus on how changed rainfall, evaporation and air temperatures might impact on stream temperatures and flows.

Opening the MDBC's first Native Fish Forum in Canberra today, Dr Craik said the project would also examine climate change impacts on shifts in spawning seasons for individual fish species.

Dr Craik said the MDBC saw climate change as one of the major risks to the shared water resources of the Basin and its ecology. The MDBC is already supporting climate change research through its membership of the \$7 million South Eastern Australian Climate Initiative (SEACI).

"Our Native Fish Strategy along with our other programs have so far insulated native fish from the worst ravages of the drought, but we do need to plan for a possible climate change future," she said.

Dr Craik said this was the first MDBC fish forum to showcase the achievements made not just under its Native Fish Strategy, but also benefits won through cooperation between other programs.

"Our overall strategy has several MDBC programs, such as the Sustainable Rivers Audit, River Murray Water, *The Living Murray*, Climate Change Program and Northern Basin Program, working in close cooperation," Dr Craik said.

"This has resulted in substantial improvement to the number and status of native fish at many places in the Murray-Darling system in the face of our worst drought on record. Our aim is to return native fish populations to 60 per cent of pre-European settlement numbers.

"We are well on the way to completing our 'Sea to Hume' program of innovative fishways to help native fish swim the length of the river.

"We are refining carp separation cages and their new cousin, carp pushing traps,," Dr Craik said.

"The first commercial harvesting operation at Lock 1 last season removed 30 tonnes of carp.

"We have placed 3,500 snags in the Murray between Hume Dam and Yarrawonga in the last two years with scientific evidence showing they are successfully providing habitats for fish."

Dr Craik said the success of the native fish projects was also due to the close cooperation with communities along the rivers through 10 "demonstration reaches" - stretches of rivers and streams where resnagging, fishways, carp management, and other techniques are used simultaneously with the help of local communities.

"The Native Fish Strategy was born and has endured its toddler years during the worst drought in the Basin's recorded history," Dr Craik said. "It is imperative, therefore, that our native fish programs continue to be flexible and able to adapt to adverse conditions."