



Midweek (Mackay & Sarina)

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Help get rid of pest

By LANCE MURRAY

REALISING the danger to regional fish stocks, two of Mackay's recreational fishing groups, Mackay Area Fish Stocking Association and Mackay Recreational Fishers Alliance Inc, along with Neil Elworthy proprietor of Tackle World Mackay, have joined forces and are seeking public assistance in the eradication of the invasive fish tilapia, found recently at the Gooseponds, North Mackay.

Tilapia are the aquatic version of the cane toad; they thrive in poor water quality, grow like wild fire and are prolific breeders.

They are a threat to native fish which are in abundance in the Gooseponds catchment area.

Spokesman Keith Day said it was imperative eradication plans were put in place and stressed how important it was to keep the infestation localised.

Mr Day also said it would be a catastrophe if 20 years of fish stocking in the Mackay region was put in jeopardy through lack of action.

"Every week and every

day is critical and that's why we have expedited our draft management plan," he said.

"Management plans include the introduction of thousands of barramundi and the removal of aquatic weeds and an urgent improvement of water quality.

"Our immediate plan (subject to Queensland Fisheries approval) is to stock the Gooseponds with as many barra as possible.

"We have sourced 1000 barra (fingerlings), and are making inquiries as to the availability of thousands of barra around the 50mm range, which we can grow out in our hatchery and release them between 100mm and 150mm in six to eight weeks."

Mackay Recreational Fishers Alliance Inc has contributed \$2500, Tackle World, Shakespeare St, Mackay have tipped in \$1500 and the Mackay Area Fishing Stocking Group will invest \$500 up front.

Mr Day said they had placed a conditional order for 500 (0.300mm) barra at eight dollars each – there goes \$4000 in a blink.

Members of the Mackay Recreational Fishers Alliance believe the community can help by sponsoring barra fingerlings or assisting in the removal of and

destruction of aquatic weeds which are the tilapia's habitat protection.

"We will be organising a community working bee in a few weeks and we are appealing to small boat owners to come along and lend a hand," he said.

Mr Murray said if all went to plan, there would be a silver lining.

Imagine how easy it is going to be to catch a barra in the middle of town in 18 months to two years?

Anglers will be beating a track to the Gooseponds to catch one of Australia's most famous sports fish.

Any flood events will flush the barra out; hopefully they will end up in the Pioneer River or other local rivers and streams.

Reef Catchments marine biologist Tim Marsden will be heading the eradication project.

To lend a hand, either by sponsoring a barra, or helping remove weed call Keith Day on 0457 737 140 or email keith.day@crawco.com.au.

Or contact Lance Murray on 0411 550 684 or lancemurray@mcs.net.au.

Or call Tim Marsden on 0407 146 887.