



Daily Mercury (Mackay)

Wednesday 21/05/2014

Page: 1  
Section: General News  
Region: Mackay QLD, AU  
Circulation: 10971  
Type: Regional  
Size: 408.00 sq.cms.



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The battle starts against introduced fish pest found in Mackay waterway

# OUR NEW CANE TOAD

**Ross Irby**

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AN EXOTIC marine pest that wipes out native freshwater fish and destroys their habitat has been found in the Gooseponds.

The shock discovery of the dreaded tilapia (right) in

North Mackay was a chance find by Tim Marsden.

The Reef Catchments marine biologist works on a federally funded project to try to keep the pest out of Central Queensland.

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**TILAPIA MENACE** | Introduced pest species poses major danger to well-being of Mackay waterways and their native populations

## Eradication drive against exotic fish found in the Gooseponds

### FROM PAGE 1

It has been breeding at Townsville, then moved south into the Burdekin River and has now spread into the Fitzroy River at Rockhampton. Negligence is being blamed for spreading the pest.

Mr Marsden scooped up a young tilapia when getting fish food for the inmates of his office aquarium.

Identified, it was not the news he wanted to hear.

Since then he and colleagues have used an electro fisher in the ponds and caught more young tilapia.

Angry that someone has acted irresponsibly, Mr Marsden said the pest could only have got into the ponds by being released. Possession of the noxious pest can draw \$200,000 fines.

Fishing expert Lance Murray revealed the news in his Mackay Midweek column today.

The pest eats almost anything in the river systems. And as the tough guy in the food chain, tilapia competes directly with native fish for food and territory and eats native fish eggs.

Mr Marsden likens their terrible effect on native species to that of cane toads.

"They chase and eat smaller fish, weeds that soak up nutrients, and affect water

quality," he said.

"They throw eco-systems out of balance and can breed up to three times a year. A very tough fish."

An eradication program will now be developed to try to "knock out" the species from the Gooseponds before they breed and spread into the Pioneer River system.

He said it was a slim chance that eradication could

be successful, but at the very least their breeding numbers could be slowed.

Poison would not be used because the large waterway supported ducks, barramundi, other fish and tortoises.

Fishermen who spot the pest should contact Fish Watch Hotline at 1800 017 116.

➔ Read Lance Murray's column

### ➔ FISHY PEST

- Tilapia are a threat to our aquatic ecosystem
- The pest has the potential to devastate entire freshwater systems by competing for food and habitat