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NOXIOUS FISH | eDNA sampling and electro fishing tools of choice to detect a pest

Tilapia fight goes high-tech

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THE FIGHT against a noxious fish species at the Gooseponds has taken a high-tech twist.

The next stage of the Mackay region's hunt for tilapia included the use of both electro fishing and eDNA sampling for the first time.

Yesterday a Reef Catchments contractor took water samples, which will be sent to James Cook University (JCU) where they will be analysed for the presence of tilapia DNA.

Catchment Solutions ecologists Trent Power said the testing system was accurate.

"The eDNA is very sensitive," he said.

"The guys did trials on a 0.4-hectare pond which is very large and they were able to detect one fish."

Mr Power said eDNA testing by itself was not enough.

"You need the other sampling method, too," he said.

"You use the eDNA method to detect whether fish are present.

"We then use the electro-fishing to determine fish size and so on.

"You need the whole picture if you are going to manage the whole situation successfully."

In June this year Reef Catchments released 1000 barramundi fingerlings into the Mackay Gooseponds to help combat the pest fish.

This new round of sampling will also help assess how well the fingerlings project is going.

Barramundi are a native predator of tilapia and provide one of few natural methods of tilapia control.

Yesterday, Reef Catchments also pulled out and tagged barramundi to track native fish movements.

The barramundi were caught using electro-fishing.

Reef Catchments project officer Iona Flett said the method wasn't harmful to the fish.

"Controlling tilapia will give native fish a better chance," she said.

"An electric current stuns the fish. They float to the surface and we can catch them with a net.

"It just gives them a little stun, but they survive."

People are advised not to consume tilapia. People who sight or catch a tilapia are asked to phone Queensland Fisheries on 13 25 23.

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CONTROL METHOD: Project manager Matt Moore and project officer Iona Flett are using a new way to control tilapia at the Gooseponds. **INSET:** How the Daily Mercury reported the outbreak in May this year. PHOTO: PETER HOLT

