



## Midweek (Mackay & Sarina)

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# Tilapia invasion more bad news

By **LANCE MURRAY**

FURTHER to my report in last week's mid-week fishing column, my personal email has been running hot – all with bad news from those who have experienced first-hand the infestation of tilapia.

In Tinnaroo Dam, where they were illegally introduced, on an average day anglers now catch between 40 and 50 many in the 5kg to 6kg range.

On the local scene, if these fish escape from the Gooseponds, many predict that within four years they will spread to Cape Conway in the north and Cape Palmerston in the south, and will have a devastating effect on commercial fishers and our local fishery may be stuffed.

Just imagine what would happen if they ended up in the Goorganga Plains wetlands; the barra nursery for the Proserpine River? In 10 years the Proserpine River would be akin to the Sahara desert.

Many proponents suggest the first option of eradication should be to poison the waterway.

This would kill all the marine life in the confinement, including turtles.

The downstream effect will be on aquatic birds, resident ducks and geese that eat the dead fish species and they too may die as experienced many years ago when an irrigation channel attached

to Kinchant Dam was poisoned to eradicate weeds and all hell broke out about the turtle and bird deaths.

The stench from dead and rotting fish will impact on nearby residents and disposal of dead fish carcasses will be an ongoing problem for weeks.

The Gooseponds are right in the middle of an urban area. The second best option, and there is no guarantee it will work, is to “bomb” the four lagoons with barra in the hope that the big fish will eat the small fish.

Keith Day a spokesperson for the Mackay Area Fish Stocking Group said they expected to be granted a permit to put 400 of the 30cm barra in the water ways in the next couple of weeks. That will be stage one; stage two is the removal of water weeds to eliminate hiding places for the juvenile tilapia and stage three will be the introduction of more mature barramundi subject to Queensland Fisheries approval.

In the meantime **Reef Catchments**, headed by marine biologist Tim Marsden, will electro-fish the Gooseponds on an

ongoing basis and remove whatever numbers are possible.

“We are planning a weekend working bee and we are hopeful of a flotilla of about 100 small boats – 25 in each catchment to remove

the weeds, probably with the assistance of a small reef anchor or other devices which are currently being worked on,” he said.

“I can't stress how urgent this is. We have a window of opportunity until we receive our first flood event. If we haven't had a 100% irradiation it's too late.”

Anglers wishing to assist with our, Barra for Tilapia campaign, or to lend a hand with their boat with weed removal please phone Lance Murray on 0411 550 684 or [lancemurray@mcs.net.au](mailto:lancemurray@mcs.net.au) or Keith Day at [keith.day@crawco.com.au](mailto:keith.day@crawco.com.au).

Hopefully we can provide weekly briefings to our mid-week readers.



**PEST ERADICATION:** **Reef Catchments** co-ordinator Tim Marsden and Tackleworld Mackay owner Neil Elworthy discuss the issue of Tilapia at the Gooseponds.

PHOTO: LEE CONSTABLE