

Freshwater Anglers Viewpoint

Brian Dare 2002

An Overview of the Last 4 Years of the Anglers Trust Fund for Freshwater Fishing

Having been approached by a political body with the up coming State elections in March 2003 to give my thoughts on the Trust Fund, I thought it should not only be up to myself to point out some of the glaring short comings of the Trust to date, but to list in my opinion those points that I feel need to be covered.

Further to this overview I have sent copies to some of the anglers and correspondents who write for fishing magazines for their input as well.

I have compiled a short list of 12 major points that I feel if put in place, should get the system up and running in the direction the end users, the anglers of NSW, would like to see their money spent. The following points are:

1. Angler Input
2. Allocation of Funds to Date
3. Grants for Fish Stocking
4. Stocking Rates
5. Breed Out Ponds
6. Minimum Size Limit Changes
7. Public Liability Cover
8. The Purchase of Fingerlings
9. Audit Report on the Trust
10. Purchase of Fingerlings
11. Local Authorities for Stocking of Fish
12. Translocation Policy os Species of Fish

Angler Input

To date this has been a grey area, the reason being that when the license was started again in 1998 the NSW Fisheries Department called for nominations for those people who wanted to sit in on the running of the Trust. Over 2000 names were submitted and vetting took place with the end result that you could have people who like to sit in on committees for the sake of doing so, or have people who had outside vested interest and were not end users. As is the case with anglers who have paid for a license and are members of stocking groups and fishing clubs. With this in mind I would suggest that the following take place.

All stocking groups and fishing clubs should re-register with NSW Fisheries so they can be put on a central register. The stocking groups and fishing clubs should then submit two names of anglers from each town. Be it one from a fishing club and one from a stocking group, whatever the situation may be in that town, to be delegates who will attend regional meetings held by NSW Fisheries each year.

It will be required by Fisheries to split the State into 3 regions using the following towns as selected venues for these regional meetings. Southern Region, Wagga Wagga. Central Region, Dubbo. Northern Region, Tamworth.

From each of the regions six (6) members are chosen by delegates to act as their peak member representatives at meetings held in Sydney, and that these take place at NSW Fisheries head office each six months. These 18 delegates will be the people who will be putting forward anglers requests from regional meetings. For example extra money for fish stocking increase in fish being released and a chance to question the audit and spending.

Allocation of Funds To Date

It would be fair to say that at least 110,000 anglers in NSW would have purchased a yearly fishing license at \$25.00. This being the case, a total of \$2,750,000 would have been collected in twelve months. Of this amount only \$700,000 has been set aside from the trust fund for the purpose of restocking fry.

The amount of \$700,000 has been the same since the re-introduction of the license in 1998. Taking that into account some \$2,800,000 has been spent on stocking fry into NSW waterways. What has happened to the other \$8,200,000 raised over the past 4 years and where and how has this been spent?

At the time of the re-introduction of the fishing license for the freshwater a rather ambiguous questionnaire was also released, and I say ambiguous because it was a type of tick the box format with little or no room for comment by anglers. If you have lucky enough to have received a copy of the trust fund audit you will see where it has been spent.

Some of the funds that were spent went to field operations (\$485,000), effectiveness of stocking research (\$202,000), regional fish habitat (\$113,000), and fishway passage/weir removal (\$196,000). All of which should come from NSW Fisheries State Budget., not from the Trust Fund. The other departments involved in some of the above projects should have put forward funds from their Department Budgets. For example, the Department of Conservation and the NSW Department Water Commission from their yearly budget, not from the anglers' trust fund. Another that comes to mind, the innovative fishway development project (\$26,000). In total for all of the above the total cost was \$1,000,000 in twelve months.

The Dollar for Dollar System

What a great little money saver this one is and Fisheries gains an extra \$200,000 spent on fish stocking if all the clubs work their guts out. This system should have ceased just 12 months after the re-introduction of the fishing license for all anglers in NSW. We still have fishing clubs and stocking groups flogging bits of paper in chook raffles in pubs and clubs to raise funds to stock rivers and streams. Why should this take place when the anglers have purchased a fishing license? The money gained through the license should be spent on stocking rivers and streams through grants. Shut the system down!

Grants for Fish Stocking

At the regional meetings each year allocation of funds from the license trust are granted via discussion with NSW Fisheries and the delegates from the local townships for the stocking of rivers and streams. Records of stocking rates are on file with Fisheries; these can be used to work out annual quotas of fingerlings to be stocked on waterways.

With large water storages NSW Fisheries and the relevant local stocking groups who live nearby these storages are to sit down and work out the stocking rates on 100 fingerlings to the hectare for each species stocked. For example, a water storage of sat 1800 hectares at full supply would cost the following:

Yellowbelly at 16c each = \$28,800
Silver perch at 16c each = \$28,800
Murray cod at 66c each = \$118,800
Total cost = \$176,400 per year

With water storages larger than the above a suggested cut off rate of 3000 hectares should apply on these.

Yellowbelly at 16c each = \$48,000
Silver perch at 16c each = \$48,000
Murray cod at 66c each = \$198,000
Total cost = \$294,000

Stocking Rates

This section covers large water storage dams and lakes man made. These are called put and take fisheries. The stocking groups and fishing clubs put the fish in for anglers to take.

With this section I would suggest that the level of fish per species per hectare at full supply should be 100 fingerlings to the hectare. NSW Fisheries sent out a proposed stocking information sheet which outlines the quantity of fry to be released into these storages by NSW Fisheries from 2000/2001 to 2003/2004, which looks quite good when you see the total amounts each year. But when you sit down with a calculator and divide the total allocation of say cod for Burrinjuck dam by the full supply level you only get 2.64 Murray cod fry to the hectare at full supply level. How many anglers fish that dam every 12 months? For Keepit Dam at Tamworth 4.62 Murray cod to the hectare, and again how many anglers fish that dam each year? What of Copeton Dam at Inverell? Well its 3.69 Murray cod fry and again how many anglers fish that dam? What about Lake Mulwala, sorry folks no cod to go in there for the next four years. Check the list out.

Again it comes back to angler input and I would like to point out here that I have a letter received from a Fisheries Department head who said and I quote "With this in mind and I t do not believe that anglers have been let down by the license expenditure committee as suggested in your letter, and would disagree with the notion that more license fees should be expended on fish stocking". End quote and this was said

because I stated that there was a short fall of 1.5 million dollars being spent on fish stocking. Oh yes, and where is the angler input in that statement. Sorry our minds are made up.

Breed Out Ponds

This apart from the actual breeding of fish in hatcheries is the next big hurdle to overcome in so much as the right time to release fish into the waterways and storages throughout NSW. It's a known fact that the fish released by NSW Fisheries into water storages are fry (that's a little fish 30mm to 35mm in length), and it applies to all species. It is also the case for private hatcheries as they have been advised that this size is acceptable when it comes to selling their product.

The following biologists, Michael Hutchison, Tom Gallagher and Keith Chilcott have done a three-year study from Queensland. A paper has been released pointing out the best size these fish should be released when stocking waterways. As for the study paper it was released in 2001/2002 from the Department of Primary Industries QLD.

This is where the breed out ponds come into play. A breed out pond is a section of water or small dam set aside for the fry to spend more time at a hatchery being fed by the producers until these fry reach a set size prior to being released into the wild. The suggested sizes were 50mm plus for silver perch and yellowbelly, and 65mm to 70mm for Murray cod.. There is a cost factor involved in this project and I could see an area where an allocation of funds could be forthcoming from the trust fund account for this project.

If plans and cost figures were advised to the angler and stocking groups seeking assistance in the form of grants from the trust, I could see a great benefit to both parties. For the anglers the knowledge that fish being purchased by groups and being put into waterways stand better survival rate giving value for money spent on restocking. For the hatcheries an overhead that would not eat into funds set-aside for breeding fish.

Lifting Minimum Size Limits on Species

This is an area that needs full input from both anglers and NSW Fisheries. In relation to Murray cod if you were to seek information from Dr Stuart Rowlands, CSIRO Grafton NSW, you would find that he would support having the minimum size limit of Murray cod lifted to 60cm. As a fish of this size would give you at least one years breeding before being kept by anglers when caught.

In the case of yellowbelly, bass, silver perch and Macquarie perch 35cm would be a better size fish to keep and would fall in line through this change with the size limits in QLD from August 2002 on.

Public Liability Cover

This is an area that needs input from the State Government as the cost of this type of cover is way out of reach for small non-profit associations, which not only includes

the anglers but as well public halls, non-profit charities and the like. What is required is an overall cover for the above groups backed by State Government.

Once insurance companies were gloried bookies who were taking a bet that nothing would go wrong over a twelve month period, but not now. Not only do they lay off on the policy but have also increased the costs. This has just happened to the fish stocking group of which I am a member. We have asked our insurance agents to try and get some type of cover but the end result was that no one would look at us.

We have been stocking the same water storage for the past 15 years during which time we have neither a mishap take place or laid a claim taken out against the group. What's wrong with the place? We have just been advised that the Qld State Government has setup an umbrella insurance policy for all non-profit groups, charities and public halls. 6000 groups in total, what about NSW doing the same?

Audit of the Trust

“Yes well” ask any fish stocking group or fishing club member in NSW if they have seen an audit report of license money collected by NSW Fisheries. These groups and their members should have a report sent out each year advising them as to where, how and when the funds were spent.

Having had the chance to actually get a copy and look at some of the areas where funds were spent a total of over one million dollars was spent on projects that should have come from the NSW Fisheries budgets and not from the Trust fund.

No doubt the reply to the above will go something like this. At the time of the re-introduction of the fishing license a questionnaire was released by NSW Fisheries with a list of areas that anglers were asked to mark in a box where they felt the funds should be spent (RE page 2 of this submission in regards to allocation of funds to date).

Local Authorities – Fishing Clubs and Stocking Groups

The above two groups should at all times be the ones responsible for the stocking of rivers, streams and waterways. By this what is meant at some stage input from local town's people needs to be seen. Over the recent years it has been the above groups who have transferred fry or fingerlings into waterways in NSW.

At no stage is this to be undertaken by other organizations or groups as it has been stocking groups and fishing clubs as well as anglers who pay to have these fish purchased and released via the license fees.

The Purchase of Fingerlings

Stocking groups and fishing clubs have no say when it comes to stocking large water storages in NSW as it is carried out by NSW Fisheries. The stocking groups in the townships near these storages should have input into releasing fish.

With rivers and streams, the above groups and clubs purchase fingerlings from private hatcheries approved by NSW Fisheries. This is a good system as checks are carried out by officers from NSW Fisheries into the running of these hatcheries. What stocking groups who are near say the Victorian or Qld borders would like to do is purchase fingerlings from hatcheries in those two States who have been checked out and received permission from their Fisheries Department to breed fish species for the purpose of restocking and commercial use.

Taking into account stress levels on fish being transported it is felt by these groups that time factors play an important part when it comes to survival of a new fish being moved around in plastic bags to locations along rivers and streams. And therefore request permission to purchase their fish from across the border.

Translocation Policy

This is becoming a major concern with the continued importation of fish species by the aquarium traders. There needs to be a series of guidelines and protocols put in place to have the above traders advise the public about the possible damages that could befall all native species of Australian freshwater fish if imported species are released into our waterways. This actually happens when Tommy or Billy gets sick of looking after the little fish mum and dad purchased for them.

One that comes to mind is the Taliapa, which has in the past 3 years taken over sections of our waterways. This species arrived in Australia via the aquarium trade. In regards to anglers wanting to target non-indigenous Australian species (putting bass into western rivers and creek systems as well as freshwater storages to give them another fish to target), should not take place.

Here again a set of guidelines should be used when it comes to a request from an angler group to have the above take place.

Summary

We have a situation within the NSW Fisheries license system that reeks of bureaucratic power to the point where the attitude is that they being anglers have no idea of how the system should be run. When you have over a four year period a total sum of some 11 million dollars collected from a license system and during that time spend only 2.8 million on restocking fish into the State's freshwater storages and river system, it leaves a sour taste in your mouth.

The 'them and us' syndrome starts to raise its ugly head and leads to people questioning the running of the system. We are only looking at the freshwater section of the license system, you would find that over 5 million dollars is floating around and yet to be used since the saltwater license was put into the license system for recreational anglers in NSW as a combined anglers license.

In late 1989 a study took place into the cost benefit of fish restocking in Australia. It was found that for each dollar spent on restocking fish a return of \$66 was gained and that was injected into the local economy through tourism via the recreational angler.

The anglers in NSW are, through the license system, now able to, as a group, voice their opinions as they are now contributing to the upkeep of the NSW Fisheries. Although at this stage those who are supposed to be representing the anglers on the trust fund expenditure committee don't seem to be doing their job.

With that in mind I feel that the anglers need more input, hence the outline I have put forward. What you are reading today has also been passed onto others within the recreational fishing groups throughout NSW. I have been involved in fish restocking for the last 15 years and as well I have based my business around freshwater fishing.

The format you have read is in place in Qld and has been very successful in the running of Queensland's freshwater fishery. Do not and I repeat do not shut down the license system in NSW otherwise you will be taking away from the recreational angler his only means of having input into his or her sport.

Brian Dare - 2002
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