

Getting ‘Finterested’ to share knowledge and bring back native fish

Dr Siwan Lovett¹

1. Australian River Restoration Centre, PO Box 881, DICKSON, ACT 2602. Email: Siwan.lovett@arrc.com.au

Key Points

- Native fish in Australia need our help through ongoing research, practice and a vibrant community of supporters if they are to survive in many of our rivers and streams.
- Managing the legacy of networks, knowledge and experience that is grown through programs of work is vital if we are to continue to build and learn on past investments.
- Getting ‘Finterested’ in fish is a new initiative that is trying to engage people and provide opportunities for them to contribute to a community passionate about ‘bringing back native fish’.

Keywords

Native fish, science communication, *Finterest*, knowledge sharing, legacy

Introduction

The Murray–Darling Basin is home to 46 native fish species ranging from the legendary metre-long Murray cod, to small species such as the Olive perchlet and Rainbowfish. They evolved to endure the irregular flooding and drying cycles that are typical of the Basin, and each species has developed different tactics for hunting, building a home and finding a mate. Over half of the Basin’s native fish are, however, considered rare and threatened. To address the challenges facing native fish, in 2003 a *Native Fish Strategy* was developed by the Murray–Darling Basin Commission and partners to guide investment in research and practice. In the first ten years of its history, the strategy has been highly successful in raising awareness and generating support for the management of native fish across the Basin.

In 2013, after ten years of community engagement, research, practical workshops and knowledge sharing forums, the Murray–Darling Basin Authority’s coordinating role for the *Native Fish Strategy* was terminated. This action has cast doubt over the future of the *Native Fish Strategy*, but there are signs that a form of the Strategy may be resurrected through a different avenue and expanded to cover the whole of inland Australia, including estuaries. While conversations are continuing about this possible expansion, the big question facing all those involved in the *Native Fish Strategy* was how to ensure the legacy of great work, contacts, information and initiative was not lost. It was also considered important to keep the community of researchers, practitioners and ‘fishy folk’ together, sharing and building on the knowledge accumulated over the first ten years of the *Native Fish Strategy*.

This presentation will talk about how the legacy of the Native Fish Strategy is being used to support those in our community who value and care about fish, as well as extending the reach of this knowledge to anyone ‘Finterested’ in fish. A range of different communication approaches are being used, with opportunities provided for anyone to share their knowledge through a vibrant website and social media community. Our vision is to *bring native fish back by providing inspiration, knowledge and insight for anyone interested in Australian freshwater fish*.

Approach

The main communication mechanism being used to share the legacy of ten years work is the new *Finterest* website www.Finterest.com.au. This site has been developed with the user in mind, it is bright, colourful and presents science in interesting ways with videos, audios, fabulous photos, and succinct summaries of key science findings. For *Finterest* to grow, collaboration with others is essential. *Finterest* relies on other organisations for new content to regularly update the website, and keep people interested in the latest fish management science and practice. The website has been built as a collaborative space, and it is hoped that financial, intellectual and social support can be gained from fish researchers, managers, recreational fishers, and anyone passionate and interested in ‘bringing back native fish’.

Our goals are to:

Provide a dynamic, easy to use website and social media platforms for sharing fish management knowledge and enable people to have conversations about ‘bringing back native fish’.

Expand the scope of the website to be Australia-wide and include estuarine fish management.

7ASM Short Communication

Lovett – Getting ‘Finterested’

Synthesise fish management knowledge and practice around issues of interest (for example, fish passage, fish habitat) and present it in ways that are meaningful, relevant and easy to access by a range of different stakeholder groups (recreational fishers, scientists, river and wetland managers).

Produce an edition of the *RipRap Magazine* each year that focuses on fish related research and practice.

Become a hub for knowledge and advice about how to establish, operate and maintain “Demonstration Reaches” and work with local communities to reach their fish management goals.

Collaborate with organisations working in fish management and research to add value to the work they are already doing and provide another avenue for them to communicate their findings and spread their message.

Continue to pursue ways to communicate fish management knowledge through innovative approaches such as True Tales of the Trout Cod, oral histories, workshops, field days etc.

Supply high level project management, collaboration and communication skills to organisations wishing to outsource some aspects of their work to a reliable, professional and successful *Finterest* team.

We don’t know whether *Finterest* is going to succeed in achieving these goals as there is little in the way of ongoing financial support for our team. We are hoping that by talking about what we are trying to achieve with those in our community (namely you!) that we can encourage people to support us either through sharing their knowledge, coming up with ideas about making *Finterest* even better, and getting involved.

Conclusions

Finterest has been developed by the not-for-profit Australian River Restoration Centre (ARRC), an organisation committed to managing rivers, valuing people and sharing knowledge. The team at ARRC want to work with others to ensure *Finterest* adds value to the great organisations and networks already working in fish management, by sharing knowledge and providing a collaborative space within which people can be inspired and supported to ‘bring back native fish’. Communication and social media specialists, the ARRC team are keen to complement other organisations already working in fisheries research and management.

Acknowledgments

Heleena Bamford, Janet Pritchard, Brian Lawrence, Jason Alexandra, Katie Ryan, Peter Jackson, Pam Clunie, Fern Hames, Matt Barwick, Pat Gudhka, Native Fish Strategy Coordinators, many scientists, community groups and practitioners across Australia who care about fish.