



Monaro Acclimatisation Society Inc
9 Thompson Drive
Tathra NSW 2550

Sustainable future fishing for trout and native fish

The Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for Environment and Water
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

I write in response to the letter from your Department (reference MC24-003514), in turn responding to my letter to you dated 5 February 2024, concerning an absence of consultation over the listing of *Galaxias terenasus* (**'round-snout galaxias'**) on the threatened species list, pursuant to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth).

I note (and accept) the Department's apology that the Monaro Acclimatisation Society Incorporated (**'MAS'**) was not consulted before this listing was made. In order to ensure that no such omission occurs in the future, I request that the MAS be included in all future consultations concerning freshwater fauna and flora affecting the Snowy/Monaro region. The MAS has an extensive network of member branches in the region – and our members are on the ground and fully attuned to environmental issues affecting freshwater fishing.

I also take this opportunity to observe that calling for submissions through *The Australian* newspaper is likely only to reach a very small proportion of people who might potentially be interested in the issue. Further, people will not be regularly scanning your Department's website to see if something relevant comes up. (Incidentally, the website link provided in the Department's letter seems to be broken.)

I seek your advice on the availability of any procedure whereby the listing of round-snout galaxias as endangered may be reviewed. The listing has resulted in the banning of trout stocking in significant stretches of streams in the Snowy River catchment that are important not only from a trout angling perspective – but important from the perspective of local and regional tourism, commerce and amenity. Moreover, the endangered listing seems to defy the counterfactual observation that trout and galaxias (not only the round-snout variety) appear to have successfully co-existed for over 130 years.

Banning trout stocking in these streams in and of itself will do little to nothing to protect the galaxiid population. Indeed, other key threatening processes listed in the Conservation Advice are likely to affect round-snout galaxias populations more than the presence of trout. Climate change and – in particular – habitat loss by reason of poor agricultural and forestry land use were listed and yet no action to address those issues seems to be occurring.

Back in the days of the Natural Heritage Trust (a Federal Government initiative) grants were given to the then Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority to remove the introduced willows from both the Snowy and MacLaughlin Rivers. These grants articulated the strategy of removal of the willows and their replacement with native species to protect the river banks and provide shelter and habitat to the river ecosystems. The willows were removed – but the native species plantings never occurred. The lack of native vegetation along most of the banks of these rivers is obvious to see – and the lack of riparian shade a matter of serious concern.

The MAS requests that Federal Government show its intent for the protection and recovery of the round-snout galaxias by investing in habitat recovery through the following measures (in whose delivery the MAS is well-equipped to assist):

- offering financial incentives to private landowners owning riverbanks on streams of the Snowy/Monaro region to fence riparian zones within all areas considered to comprise the round-snout galaxias range;
- provide funding to allow replanting of native species vegetation within the said riparian zones;
- the development of education and incentive programs to encourage landowners to value good water quality and reduce sediment runoff from their farms and cultivations; and,
- to assist the Gaden Hatchery to develop a captive breeding program for the round-snout galaxias, and the capacity to distribute the round-snout galaxias to enhance the species' well-being and survival.

Regrettably, the MAS will be obliged to conclude that if none of the above initiatives are implemented, then we must believe that this has all been an exercise in attempting to remove trout from the Snowy catchment by stealth. The social, economic and recreational value that this activity provides for the local – and the wider Australian community – is being totally ignored.

Lastly, I wish to raise a separate issue of concern. On Saturday, 2 March 2024, a number of MAS members were camping and fishing on the upper Tooma River. They observed three people drive up the Dargals Fire Trail in an old HiLux truck. They stopped to converse with our members, and told them that they were University of Canberra students. Our members observed that they had with them fly-fishing gear and an electro-fishing unit. The students told the MAS members were that they were there to survey the feeder streams of the Tooma River for native fish.

The MAS believes that their dominant reason to be there was to fish for trout, and that they got a key to enter the Kosciuszko National Park on the pretext of surveying native fish. If this conclusion is correct, we find this an astonishingly cavalier approach to an important scientific survey. If this is the way the lower Snowy catchment was surveyed, we are greatly disappointed. Needless to say, we note that electro-fishing if done incorrectly, it causes serious spinal injuries to fish and kills macro-invertebrates.

Yours sincerely

Kerry Pfeiffer
President