



Monaro Acclimatisation Society Inc
9 Thompson Drive
Tathra, NSW. 2550

Sustainable future fishing for trout and native fish

Monaro Acclimatisation Society Inc, Presidents Report 2024

Dear MAS members and supporters.

I am taking this unusual step of publishing my Presidents Report for 2024 prior to the upcoming Annual General Meeting of the Monaro Acclimatisation Society on Saturday 5 February 2024.

In August last year I received advice from NSW Fisheries that a number of our traditional trout stocking sites would no longer be allowed to be stocked due to a decision by the NSW Fisheries Threatened Species Unit. This was a real shock to your Executive, as we had no inkling that any such move was afoot. We were allowed to make the 2023 – 24 stockings but about eight weeks ago the Secretary, Rod Whiteway, and I had a meeting with the NSW Fisheries, Recreational Fishing Unit, where the extent of the stocking bans for 2024-25 were explained to us. There were two reasons given for the bans and they relate to separate threatened species. I will discuss each in turn.

In March 2023 the Commonwealth declared that a galaxias found across the Monaro had been declared a new threatened species. This new species, *Galaxias Terenasus* has been co-existing with trout since stocking began and despite the research indicating that the species is increasing on the Monaro the limited research to establish a limited population was enough for the little fish to be declared endangered.

As a result of this we are no longer allowed to stock a significant section of the middle MacLaughlin River, about half of the Cambalong Creek, a significant section of the Snowy River which includes the reach that runs through Dalgety township and most of the Delegate River which also includes the reach that runs through the Delegate township. There is no doubt there will be more of this to come.

The most disappointing thing about all of this is not so much the decision, but the clandestine way the process has unfolded. Throughout the Commonwealth's listing process the MAS was unaware that it was occurring, and as it turns out neither was the Recreational Fishing Unit of NSW Fisheries. We know that the Threatened Species Unit had some prior knowledge as some of their research was used in the determination and that Unit knew of the listing when they objected to our 2023 stocking plan.

At first glance it appears to the Executive of the MAS that there is a significant level of dysfunction in NSW Fisheries where the Threatened Species Unit is not prepared to share information with the Recreational Fishing Unit and outside organisations such as the MAS. The NSW Fisheries Threatened Species Unit seems unconcerned about how their decisions affect recreational fishing. But in today's world the public expects its public service to be open and transparent with decisions that affect the public, but it seems to be lacking in this case.

But it does not stop there. At the same meeting we were also informed that we would no longer be able to stock rainbow trout in the whole of Adjungbilly Creek near Tumut and the whole of the Murrumbidgee River upstream from the Numeralla River confluence to Tantangara Dam and beyond. The MAS stopped stocking brown trout in these sections in 2004 in line with the regulations to protect Macquarie Perch, but the extension to now prohibit rainbows was again a complete surprise. We have tried to elicit from NSW Fisheries what has changed to bring about this decision but all we have been told is that it is to do with Macquarie Perch. We have no other details, and it seems neither does the NSW Fisheries Recreational Fishing Unit. Again, this has been kept secret with little to no information provided from the NSW Fisheries Threatened Species Unit. Secrecy and clandestine operations seem to be the latest trend of the NSW Fisheries Threatened Species Unit and obviously this is tolerated by the leadership group.

In an earlier example, the stocking of trout cod in the Goodradigbee River by the Threatened Species Unit was not disclosed and the MAS only found out when a trout cod was discovered by one of our members. If this had not happened the clandestine stocking could have continued for years and anglers jeopardized if they kept one for the table thinking it was a murray cod.

To be quite honest, this closed-door policy towards the MAS, and the silo mentality within NSW Fisheries has played heavily on my mind. I have spent the last months trying to figure out why the MAS would be treated like this. I believe we have always tried to work with NSW Fisheries, and we have helped the Threatened Species Unit, especially on Macquarie Perch, but it seems that the hatred for trout within that unit knows no bounds. A word of advice here “be careful what you wish for”. Across NSW when trout fisheries have disappeared the void has been filled by redfin perch. To say I feel betrayed is an understatement and to say I am worried for the future is a fact.

Having thought about this deeply I have decided that I will not be standing for the role of President of the MAS at the AGM in February. After 29 years at the helm, I think it is best if I slink off into the sunset. To be honest this latest event has severely weathered my resilience. It is time to step down.

I have enjoyed my time as President, and I believe that the MAS has achieved some great wins during my time. I note with great pride the following successes:

- Saving Gaden Hatchery from closure after NSW Fisheries recommended to the Minister of the day that it be closed.
- Working with Gaden Hatchery to gradually move from mostly stocking fry to more fingerlings.
- Building the profile of the MAS from a small niche organization to one that is now well-recognised across the angling and environmental spheres.
- Championing the restructure of access to the Eucumbene River during the spawning run, now a much more pleasant experience for those who like that sort of fishing.
- Negotiating with Snowy Hydro for the recreational fishing offset of a grow-out facility to be able to produce yearling fish to combat redfin should they enter the snowy lakes due to the project. The \$5 million facility is still in the planning

stage, but the finances are waiting and once the current restructuring of Gaden is complete we should see work begin on the grow-out facility.

- Working with Snowy Hydro to re-develop the Providence Portal outflow into Lake Eucumbene. Over the years, the banks of the Portal were seriously eroding. The works to rock line the banks has resulted in a first class fix for that problem.
- Successfully opposing the sale of over 20 Crown Roads which lead to fishing locations. The amount of work involved in this project has been significant and time consuming, but the MAS has been very successful in keeping these access points in the public domain.

Apart from Crown Roads, all of these things were achieved with either little input from NSW Fisheries or, in some cases, direct opposition so those successes are a mark of the value of the MAS to recreational fishing.

In closing I would just like to thank all the members of the MAS Executive who have worked with me over the years. To Rod Whiteway, Noel Buckland, Kerry Pfeiffer and Bill Blair thanks for being there. To all the MAS members who have attended meetings regularly and infrequently, thank you for being there. To those who devote their time to stocking and other works thank you for being there.

I could not say goodbye without thanking the staff at Gaden Trout Hatchery. The current crop of staff under the capable leadership of Mitch Elkins are doing an outstanding job. It has been a pleasure working with them and the results are witnessed by the current outstanding fishing we now have, albeit under serious threat for the long term.

I would just like to make a special mention to Mr. Charlie Litchfield from Snowy Hydro. Charlie has been my main contact for all things to do with Snowy Hydro and the lakes. In him I have found a man who is very slow to say no, is thoughtful before saying yes, but when he does, his word is his bond.

Regardless of what I have said about NSW Fisheries in this report, they are not all tarred with the same brush. There are some good people there, but it seems that the Recreational Fishing side of things is kept in the dark by the other.

I will be taking some time off to enjoy a bit more time fishing and being with Lyn, who has put up with a lot. I may pop up from time to time in a limited way, but my best days are behind me. I wish you all the best and I am sure that whoever takes over the role of President of the MAS will do it their way but do it well.

Regards

Steve Samuels

Soon to be Immediate Past President

Monaro Acclimatisation Society Inc

30 January 2024