

12 Ovens River Catchment

"We have heard a good deal," says the *Ovens Spectator*, "of the extraordinary number of fish taken out of the Ovens River by the baskets of Mr. Henley's wheel at Oxley, which he uses for lifting water for irrigation purposes. On a recent visit to Mr. Henley's, we witnessed the curious process—one never contemplated by the proprietor, speculative as he is. The buckets are rather deep, and as the fish endeavour to make up the river, they get into them as they pass, evidently to escape the force of the down current, and are thus lifted and emptied with the water into the flume. Large and small keep constantly turning up, and of all kinds, but they generally come in shoals, and we ourselves witnessed within half-an-hour some two dozen fish, chiefly bream, weighing from a few ounces to three and four pounds each. The small ones are of course returned to the river, but we believe at least a hundred weight of saleable fish in the 24 hours is the rule and not the exception. From the flume and race the fish are lifted by a net, and deposited in an artificial pond through which water is constantly running, and here they are also netted as required, and sold in the same condition as if then and there taken out of the river. In connexion with this we have a curious snake story. On first approaching the flume with Mr. Henley, we observed a great commotion amongst the fish just raised, which was difficult to account for. Presently a tiger snake put his head out, and was crawling up the bank when Mr. Henley killed it with the hoop of the net which he had in his hand. We did not think at the moment of opening him, but we have no doubt he was having a meal of the small fry."

Argus, 25 January 1871

“We have heard a good deal,” says the Ovens Spectator, “of the extraordinary numbers of fish taken out of the Ovens River by the baskets of Mr. Henley’s wheel at Oxley, which he uses for lifting later for irrigation purposes. On a recent visit to Mr. Henley’s, we witnessed the curious process – one never contemplated by the proprietor, speculative as he is. The buckets are rather deep, and as the fish endeavour to make up the river, they get into them as they pass, evidently to escape the force of the down current, and are thus lifted and emptied with the water into the flume. Large and small keep constantly turning up, and of all kinds, but they generally come in shoals, and we ourselves witnessed in half-an-hour some two dozen fish, chiefly bream, weighing from a few ounces to three and four pounds each. The small ones are of course returned to the river, but believe at least a hundred weight of saleable fish in the 24 hours is the rule and not the exception. From the flume and race the fish are lifted by a net, and deposited in an artificial pond through which water is constantly running, and here they are also netted as required, and sold in the same condition as if then and there taken out of the river. In connexion with this we have a curious snake story. On first approaching the flume with Mr. Henley, we observed a great commotion amongst the fish just raised which was difficult to account for. Presently a tiger snake put his head out, and was crawling up the bank when Mr. Henley killed it with the hoop of the net which he had in his hand. We did not think at the moment of opening him, but we have no doubt he was having a meal of the small fry”.

Argus, 25 January 1871

Figure 12.1 **The Ovens River Catchment showing major waterways and key localities.**



12.1 Early European Accounts

Hume and Hovell on the 24th of November, 1824 encountered a modest river near the present locality of Boorhaman. They named this the Ovens, after Major John Ovens the late private secretary of Governor Brisbane. On the return leg of their journey, on the 31st of December, they recorded catching an abundance of fish from the Ovens River but provided no details to identify the species (Bland, 1831). A cattle station named 'Wangaratta', reputedly meaning the place where cormorants nested, was established by 1838 on the Ovens River by George Faithful (Whittaker, 1963), and other settlers soon followed. At the beginning of 1852 there was a relatively low population in the region, but this changed with the discovery of gold at Spring Creek where Beechworth now stands. By the end of that year, 8,000 miners were at work on the Spring and Reids Creeks, and within a decade 30,000 miners were in the region, resulting in Beechworth becoming the capital of north eastern Victoria (Flett, 1979). Further gold rushes occurred at El Dorado, Buckland Valley, Morses Creek (Bright) and Harrietville, with numerous smaller workings in the catchment.

Henry Morgan migrated to the Buckland Valley to seek his fortune as a gold miner. He became a permanent resident of the area and notable road builder. His journal between 1858 and 1867 contains numerous references to the success of his angling activities in the Buckland River, a typical comment being: 'went fishing and caught a good mess for supper' (Morgan, 1908). He also fished other waters including the Mannus Creek near Tumbarumba, and the Buffalo and Big Rivers. Although he usually did not identify the type of fish caught, he twice recorded catching Blackfish, with other larger fish not named. The Reverend Daniel Draper visited north east Victoria during October 1863, travelling through Beechworth, Yackandandah, Morses Creek and Myrtleford. While passing through the upper Ovens Valley his party was served cod from the local hotel: 'We all – Dr. Hutchinson, Mr. Witt, and myself – stopped at a wayside hotel, "Porepunkah," for shelter. Had fine fish for supper, cod from the Ovens river' (Symons, 1870). Given his reported lack of transport in the region at that time, the cod were most likely taken from the Ovens River at the rear of the pub in Porepunkah. In 1908, naturalist C. F. Cole observed that Catfish were present in permanent billabongs in the Bright area as well as 'shoals of small perch of different species' amongst the aquatic vegetation on the banks of the river itself (Cole, 1908).

Early newspapers described an abundance of fish in local rivers. One account reported that a water wheel set up on the Ovens River near Oxley, was capturing large numbers of fish which swam accidentally into its buckets:

The buckets are rather deep, and as the fish endeavour to make it up the river, they get into them as they pass, evidently to escape the force of the down current, and are thus lifted and emptied with the water into the flume. Large and small keep constantly turning up, and of all kinds, but they generally come in shoals, and we ourselves witnessed in half-an-hour some two dozen fish, chiefly bream, weighing from a few ounces to three and four pounds each. The small ones are of course returned to the river, but believe at least a hundred weight of saleable fish in the 24 hours is the rule and not the exception (*Argus*, 25 January 1871).

Lagoons near the King River contained numbers of Catfish (*Argus*, 26 December 1917), while further upstream the Buffalo River was reported to contain 'voracious Murray cod and perch' (*Argus*, 16 August 1884). An unusual visitor to the Ovens River was a seal which was captured near Peechelba. Another was reported as residing at Lake Moodemere near the Murray River (*Argus*, 8 May 1865).

As the gold rush subsided, Beechworth's fortunes waned but it remained an important centre. A disused quarry on the edge of the town was proposed by council to be converted into an ornamental and recreational

lake. In the 1920's Beechworth won the 'Ideal Town Competition' two years running for a total prize of £400, and the funds were put towards building a dam to form a lake. It was completed in 1928 and named in honour of the man who oversaw the project, Mr. L. H. Sambell, President of the Beechworth Promotional Council. Part of the vision for Lake Sambell was the creation of a recreational fishery. A permit was obtained to capture juvenile 'cod' and 'bream' from the Ovens River and relocate them to the lake in the hope that they might breed and provide fishing (*Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 28 April 1928; Iris Mannik, pers. com.).

The *Ovens and Murray Advertiser* of 28 April 1928 reported planning to 'make arrangements for stocking the new lake with Macquarie perch and Murray cod from Ovens River' and that 'a number of volunteers have agreed to visit Everton at the week end to angle for the necessary number'. The same paper subsequently reported that:

About 70 fish had been caught in the Ovens River and set free in the lake the previous night, and more that afternoon. The men were going fishing again and probably 200 or 300 bream and cod would be put in the lake which would be closed against fishing for 12 or 18 months. He also warned anyone who dumped redfins into this lake that they would be dumped in themselves (*Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 2 May 1928).

The paper also published a notice for a meeting to be held on May 4 1928 to form an Angler's club, and 'to organize in regard to the stocking of the new lake with Murray cod and Macquarie perch'. The Macquarie perch failed to thrive in the lake, but the cod did, and Lake Sambell became noted as one of only two essentially land-locked artificial lakes in Victoria that supported a cod fishery (Cadwallader, 1977).

While the Ovens River had not been subject to commercial fishing since the 1890s, Colonel John Langtry recorded some information and a few observations on the Ovens River district in 1948 as part of his survey of the inland fishery (Cadwallader, 1977). This included the results of drum netting carried out in the Ovens River by Victorian Fisheries and Game Department Inspector Clarrie Howe. One Murray cod, five Trout cod, five Macquarie perch and 14 Redfin perch were captured. Although Langtry did not provide a location for the netting, the late Wallace 'Laddie' Clifford, a professional fisherman of Barmah who knew Langtry, informed the author that the activity took place in the Peechelba area (Laddie Clifford, pers. com.). Langtry provided a general account of the Ovens fishery between Wangaratta and Yarrawonga Weir. He reported the presence of both cod species, Macquarie perch, Redfin perch, Tench and occasionally Silver perch. He noted the absence of Golden perch and the prevalence of Trout cod at the time. Langtry also highlighted the significance of the population of cod in Lake Sambell, and recorded that they appeared to be Trout cod (Cadwallader, 1977).

12.2 The Past Distribution of Fishes in the Ovens River Catchment

The *Sustainable Rivers Audit* (Davies *et al.*, 2008) divided the Ovens Catchment into a lowland zone (downstream from Rocky Point near Myrtleford, and Moyhu), a slopes zone (upstream to Smoko, Abbeyards and William Hovell), and an upland zone beyond these locations, with a few headwater streams extending into a montane zone, the zones being defined by altitude. Confined valleys and gravel substrates typical of slopes habitat are found further downstream than these limits, to at least Everton in the Ovens River. Slopes type habitat extends upstream to King River Camp near Cheshunt in the King River, and Buffalo Dam in the Buffalo River, where the floodplain largely disappears, indicating commencement of upland type habitat. These amendments to the *Sustainable Rivers Audit* habitat zones have been used in the following discussion.

Much of the information presented below comes from senior residents recalling both their own experiences and stories told to them by past generations (mainly OH 96-109). It is supported by some early detailed

newspaper accounts and a relatively small number of photographs. Additional sources were Gladys Ellis, the wife of the late Bill Ellis, a professional fisherman who lived at Boorhaman, and Greg Dunkley a nephew of Bill Ellis. Both provided useful information on fish in the lower Ovens River based on Bill's experiences and their own observations not recorded in the oral histories.

12.2.1 The Montane Zone

Much of the montane zone in this catchment is effectively isolated from downstream fish populations by steep gradients and waterfalls at the base of Mt Buffalo and the Wabonga Plateau. The exceptions may have been in the upper King and Buckland Rivers, where the gradients are less severe. No information was obtained to indicate that any larger native fish species were historically present in the montane zone. It is suspected that river Blackfish may have been present in some areas in the montane zone based on their current presence in similar habitat in the adjacent Goulburn and Mitta Mitta catchments, as reported in the *Sustainable Rivers Audit*.

12.2.2 The Upland Zone

There is good historical evidence that substantial populations of cod, Macquarie perch and Blackfish were present in this zone, particularly in the Buffalo River (Carmody, OH 98; Mitchell, OH 100) and the King River (Burrowes, OH 107; Suffield, OH 108). A newspaper account reported that a bushfire in 1914 killed huge numbers of fish in the Buffalo River, describing how 'their dead carcasses, large and small, could be seen floating down the river. The party found it impossible to estimate the number of dead fish seen' (*Argus*, 2 February 1914). This account, combined with the oral history of very large numbers of cod being taken by a road building team at Abbeyards, 'enough taken in one evening to feed 130 men' (Mitchell, OH 100), suggests that cod were originally very common in upland habitat in the Buffalo River.

The recollections of many people are that most of the cod in the Buffalo River upstream of Dandongadale were Trout cod. These include the Holt brothers from Beechworth (Holt, OH 102; Holt, OH 103) who were familiar with the species in Lake Sambell, and Bert Carmody, who also noted that cod were present in the lower Catherine River (Carmody, OH 98). Bert McKenzie reported that he caught mainly Trout cod upstream of Nug Nug around 1932, but caught both Murray cod and Trout cod closer to Myrtleford (McKenzie, OH 96). An old photograph of cod caught in the Buffalo River may include a Trout cod based on general body form, though the image is too poor to discern markings (OR4). Small numbers of Trout cod were caught by anglers between Dandongadale and Abbeyards until the early 1980s. One specimen was photographed by the author (OR21) and delivered alive to the Inland Fisheries Research Station at Narrandera in 1980. In addition, it is clear from the oral history, that Macquarie perch were once very common to abundant in the upper Buffalo River, and at least present in its larger tributaries the Dandongadale and Rose Rivers (Mitchell, OH 100; Daws, OH 99).

The oral history records that both cod and Macquarie perch were once present in the King River above Cheshunt, with cod penetrating to at least the 'Bog Hole' about 18 kilometres upstream of the present William Hovell Dam (Burrowes, OH 107; Suffield, OH 108). Cod were so common in the area that they provided a reliable food source for the Burrowes family who lived near where the dam wall now stands (Burrowes, OH 107). A newspaper story supports the oral history, recording cod and bream as being common near Cheshunt until 1915 (*Argus*, 5 February 1915). Two anglers specifically described Trout cod as having been abundant in the lower reaches of the King River (Carmody, OH 98; Suffield, OH 108), with reports of captures as far upstream as Whitfield (Suffield, OH 108) and near Cheshunt (Holt, OH 103). These accounts and the capture of the occasional Trout cod in the Cheshunt area up to the early 1980s, including one that was photographed by

the author (OR20), suggests that they would have been present in the upper reaches of the King River as part of the reported cod captures. Cod were also originally present in the upland zone in the lower Catherine, and near the boundary of the slopes and upland zones at Buckland Junction and the Ovens River near Germantown (Carmody, OH 98). Macquarie perch have been reported from the outskirts of Harrietville in the upper Ovens River (Carmody, OH 98). Blackfish were recorded as common in the Brandy Creek on the upper Buffalo River in 1887 (Morgan, 1908).

Using the information available from the Buffalo and King Rivers, it may be inferred that cod, particularly Trout cod, Macquarie perch and Blackfish, were once common to abundant in at least the lower reaches of the larger upland rivers of the Ovens Catchment. A relic population of Catfish persists in one lagoon near Harrietville in the upper Ovens River (Jarod Lyons, pers. com.) suggesting that this species reached the very bottom of this zone in at least the Ovens River.

12.2.3 The Slopes Zone

A number of first hand oral accounts suggest that Trout cod, Murray cod, Macquarie perch and Blackfish were once common to abundant in this zone. Cod were reported to be very common near Bright where, as late as 1926, a newspaper account recorded that many cod were taken from the Ovens River (*Argus*, 17 March 1926). Cod were originally present in some of the larger creeks such as the Barwidgee and Rose White Creeks near Myrtleford (Grattidge, OH 97), as well as Morses Creek near Bright (*Argus*, 17 March 1926). Cod were also present in lagoons, with a 54 lb. (24.6 kg) fish found stranded in one near Porepunkah (*Argus*, 26 January 1938).

At Porepunkah cod were on the menu of the hotel there in 1863 (Symons, 1870) and oral history recalls the presence of Trout cod at that location (Carmody, OH 98). Trout cod were abundant in the Ovens River near Myrtleford until around 1930 (Carmody, OH 98; Grattidge, OH 97). A cod was captured and photographed downstream of Eurobin in 1948, and may be a Trout cod (OR26). Downstream from Dandongadale the oral history recalls that Trout cod and Murray cod were common in the lower Buffalo River (McKenzie, OH 96; Carmody, OH 98), with photographs recording the presence of the latter (OR31; OR32).

Bert Carmody recalled that small Trout cod were almost in pest proportions in the Ovens River at Gapsted in the late 1920s when he was a boy (Carmody, OH 98). Trout cod have been reported as having been abundant towards the bottom of the slopes zone in the Everton area (Carmody, OH 98; Suffield, OH 108). The oral evidence that Trout cod were abundant in the slopes zone is supported by the creation of the Trout cod population in Lake Sambell at Beechworth. Although it is probable that some Murray cod were included in the fish released into the lake, there is no evidence from photographs or oral history of the species having been present in the water. A very small number of photos of catches of cod from the lower slopes zone of the Ovens River have been located. These date from the 1930s (OR11-15), and contain images of large Murray cod. It appears that Trout cod were once abundant in the rivers and their larger tributaries in the slopes zone of the Ovens Catchment. Murray cod were common and some very large specimens were taken, but small Trout cod were prevalent.

Several witnesses recall Macquarie perch and Blackfish having been generally abundant in the rivers and creeks of this zone (Carmody, OH 98; Grattidge, OH 97; Kneebone, OH 101), with Bert Carmody recalling that both were common in lagoons (Carmody, OH 98). Oral history suggests that Silver perch may also have occurred in this zone penetrating well upstream, their seasonal presence possibly related to spawning migrations. Gary Daws (Daws, OH 99) reported that his father-in-law caught numbers of 'grunter' in a drum

net at Rocky Point c1930. He highlighted the fact that they were different to the Macquarie perch frequently captured. Walter Grattidge also reported that some 'grunter' (Silver perch) were captured from a lagoon at nearby Whorouly (Grattidge, OH 97). Les Maples recalled the late Jim Skins catching Silver perch as a boy at Whitfield, in the 1920s. Jim Skins was apparently able to differentiate between Macquarie perch, which were common at Whitfield at the time, and the much less common Silver perch (Maples, OH 109). Small numbers of 'grunter' or Silver perch were also caught in the Everton area during the 1930s (Carmody, OH 98).

Catfish were common in the lagoons and larger creeks of the slopes zone, and regularly taken in the quiet backwaters of the Ovens River itself in the Everton, Whorouly and Myrtleford areas (Grattidge, OH 97; Kneebone, OH 101; Daws, OH 99; Carmody, OH 98; O'Connor, OH 111). They were reported as far upstream as lagoons near Porepunkah (Carmody, OH 98), and at Bright (Cole, 1908). There is a relic population present today near Harrierville (Jarod Lyons, pers. com.). Catfish were present as far upstream as billabongs in the Claremont area of the King River (Burrowes, OH 107). They may have penetrated further upstream to near Cheshunt, where suitable lagoon habitat existed.

The oral history suggests that Golden perch reached the lower reaches of the slopes zone, but they appear to have been uncommon in this habitat in the Ovens Catchment with few mentions in oral accounts (Carmody, OH 98; Holt, OH 102). One newspaper account suggests that in the early years Golden perch were taken in numbers as far upstream as Whitfield (*Argus*, 22 August 1936).

12.2.4 The Lowland Zone

Historic written and oral records suggest that most of the larger native fish species were originally very common to abundant in this zone, the main exceptions being Golden perch and Silver perch. The oral history reports Golden perch as having been uncommon in the Ovens River itself, more frequently captured from the billabongs in the late 1920s (Knox, OH 106). Occasional captures were made in the Wangaratta area, but they appear to have been more regularly encountered further downstream in the Ovens River (Kneebone, OH 101; Suffield, OH 108). Silver perch were reported to be usually uncommon, though caught in numbers from time to time when schools were encountered (Knox, OH 106). John Langtry also reported occasional captures from the Ovens River taking place around 1948 (Cadwallader, 1977). The reported relative scarcity of these two perch species in oral accounts may have been the product of an early decline in the Ovens Catchment. A newspaper account reported that, originally, Golden perch were fairly common in the lowland zone (*Argus*, 22 August 1936). Another reported large specimens being taken from the King River (*Argus*, 13 March 1925). The limited available evidence may under-estimate the original abundance of Golden perch and Silver perch in this catchment. Both species were taken in numbers during a survey at Albury as late as 1928 (NSW Fisheries Report, 1929) suggesting that they originally may have had a significance presence in the lower Ovens River.

The historic presence of Trout cod in the lower Ovens is confirmed by Langtry's accounts (Cadwallader, 1977), as well as a photograph of a large Trout cod in *The Complete Book of Australian Fishing* (Hungerford, 1976) that was caught in the Ovens River near Peechelba in 1959 (Lance Wedlick, pers. com.). It is apparent that both Trout cod and Murray cod occurred in the lowland zone, although their relative abundances are uncertain. Langtry noted that Trout cod were 'prevalent' in the Ovens River, but apart from the limited netting data, did not explain how he reached this conclusion. 'Black Trout cod' were caught in the Boorhaman area by Bill Ellis who considered them to be nearly as common as Murray cod prior to the 1950s (Gladys Ellis, pers. com.).

Trout cod were reported to be less common than Murray cod in the Wangaratta area in the 1930s (Knox, OH 106), but very common in the Ovens River upstream near Tarrawingee, as well as in the lower King River near

Targoora, and in Yellow Creek (Suffield, OH 108). Trout cod were also particularly common at the top of the lowland zone in the King River, where they were referred to as 'King cod' (Carmody, OH 98; Suffield, OH 108). The Holt brothers also recalled their father catching the species in the King River around the time of the Second World War (Holt, OH 102; Holt, OH 103). The differences in the abundance of the two cod species in the lowland zone reported in the oral history may reflect on local variations in habitat. Oral history suggests that Murray cod were more prevalent below Wangaratta, and Trout cod more prevalent upstream, however, definitive data is lacking. Murray cod up to 78 lb. (35.5 kg) were taken from the lower reaches of the Reids Creek near Wangaratta (*Argus*, 28 September 1867), and one of 58 lb. (26.4 kg) from the Maloneys Creek near Oxley (*Camperdown Chronicle*, 10 February 1931). Overall, both cod species were abundant in the lowland zone, though Trout cod have not been reported from lagoon habitats. Murray cod were frequently taken from lagoons near Wangaratta and near Boorhaman (Knox, OH 106; Gladys Ellis & Greg Dunkley, pers. com.).

Catfish were once common in the lagoons near Oxley (*Argus*, 14 December 1917; 26 December 1917) and in Wangaratta (Knox, OH 106). They were regularly caught from the Ovens River itself near Wangaratta until the 1930s (Suffield, OH 108), and were taken in the quiet backwaters of both the Ovens and lower King Rivers near Oxley (Carmody, OH 98). Multiple oral accounts report Macquarie perch to have been abundant in the Ovens River (Knox, OH 106; Carmody, OH 98; Suffield, OH 108). Macquarie perch and Blackfish were once abundant in both the river and the lagoons in the Boorhaman area, small perch and Blackfish being considered as pests during the early 1930s (Gladys Ellis, pers. com.). At Boorhaman, Catfish were abundant in lagoons and fairly common in the river itself, and at times 'grunter' (Silver perch) and Golden perch were captured from both types of habitat (Gladys Ellis & Greg Dunkley, pers. com.). Blackfish appear to have been generally abundant in all lowland habitats, including creeks such as the Hurdle Creek near Oxley (Carmody, OH 98).

12.2.5 Estimates of Native Fish Abundance in the Ovens River Catchment at European Settlement.

Presented below are the rarity scores used in the *Sustainable Rivers Audit* (Davies *et al.*, 2008) which were developed by an expert panel using historical evidence available prior to 2008. They indicate the probability of capturing a particular fish species using standardized survey techniques such as electrofishing. They are compared to those developed in the *True Tales* Project using more recently obtained historical evidence and are based on the typical size of angler catches in the oldest accounts.

Table 12.1 Ovens River Catchment Rarity Scores (Main River Channels)

Species	Lowland* Murray River to Everton & Moyhu		Slopes* Everton & Moyhu to Smoko, King River Camp & Buffalo Dam		Upland* † Smoko, King River Camp & Buffalo Dam to 700m ASL		Montane Upstream of 700m ASL	
	SRA	True Tales	SRA	True Tales	SRA	True Tales	SRA†	True Tales
Trout cod	5	5	3	5	1	U3	0	0
Murray cod	5	5	1	U3	0	U1	0	0
Golden perch	5	L3	1	1	0	0	0	0
Silver perch	3	L3	0	U1	0	0	0	0
Macquarie perch	5	5	3	5	3	L5	0	0
Catfish	1	3	0	L3	0	L1?	0	0
'Blackfish'	3	5	3	5	3	5	0	?

Key

0 = Absent: no credible account reporting the species former presence

1 = Rare: a few individual fish could be expected to be taken by a resident angler each year

3 = Common: regularly taken by a resident angler in small numbers

5 = Abundant: frequently taken by a resident angler in good numbers

L = abundance at the lower end rating

U = abundance at the upper end rating

Ratings in bold type supported by multiple accounts or lines of evidence e.g. oral history, newspaper accounts, photographs

* Note: Some of the boundaries used for this zone are at a lower altitude than those used in the *Sustainable Rivers Audit*

† Note: Most of the evidence for these ratings comes from the Buffalo River near Abbeyards and the King River above William Hovell Dam.

Figure 12.2

Historical Records for Murray cod and Trout cod in the Owens River Catchment

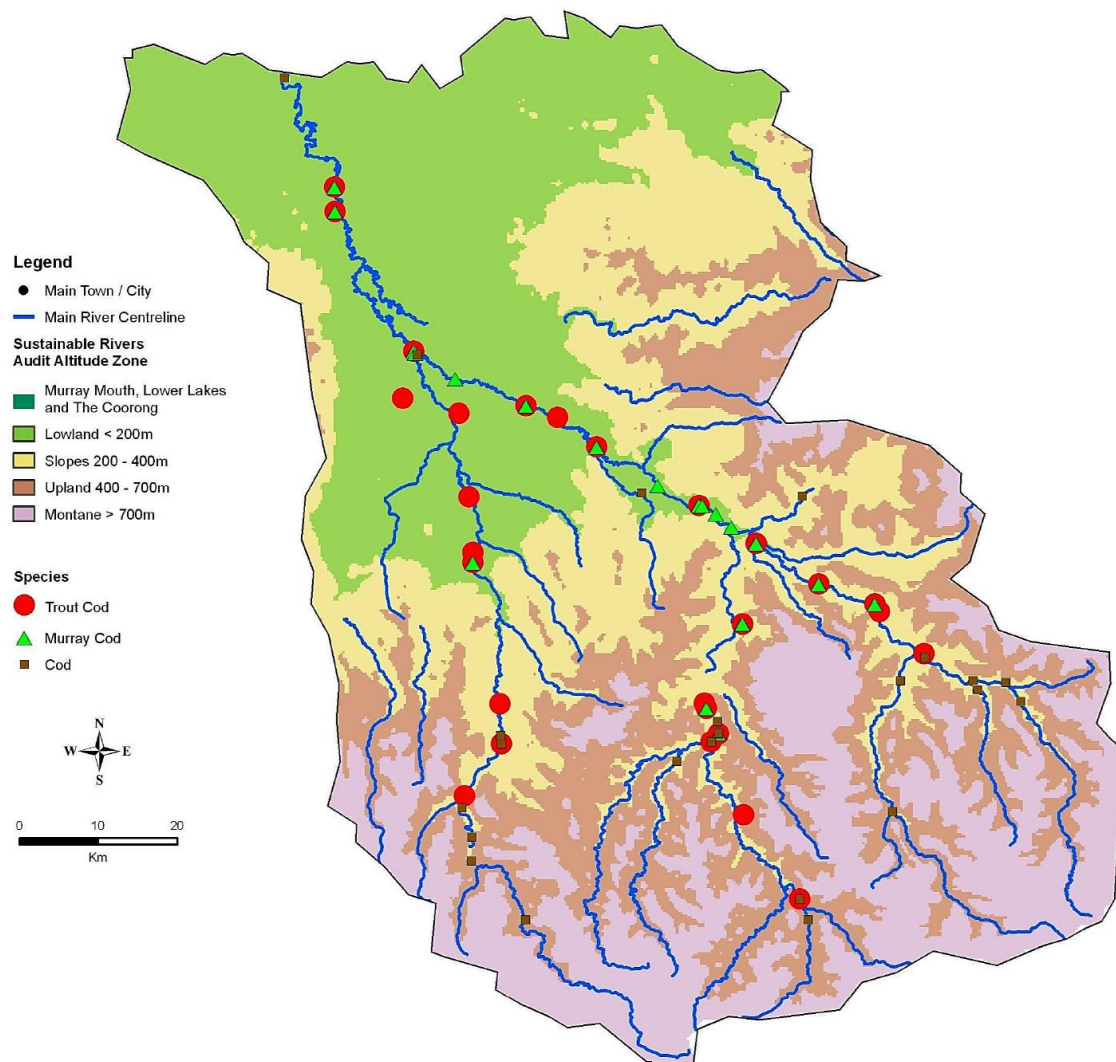
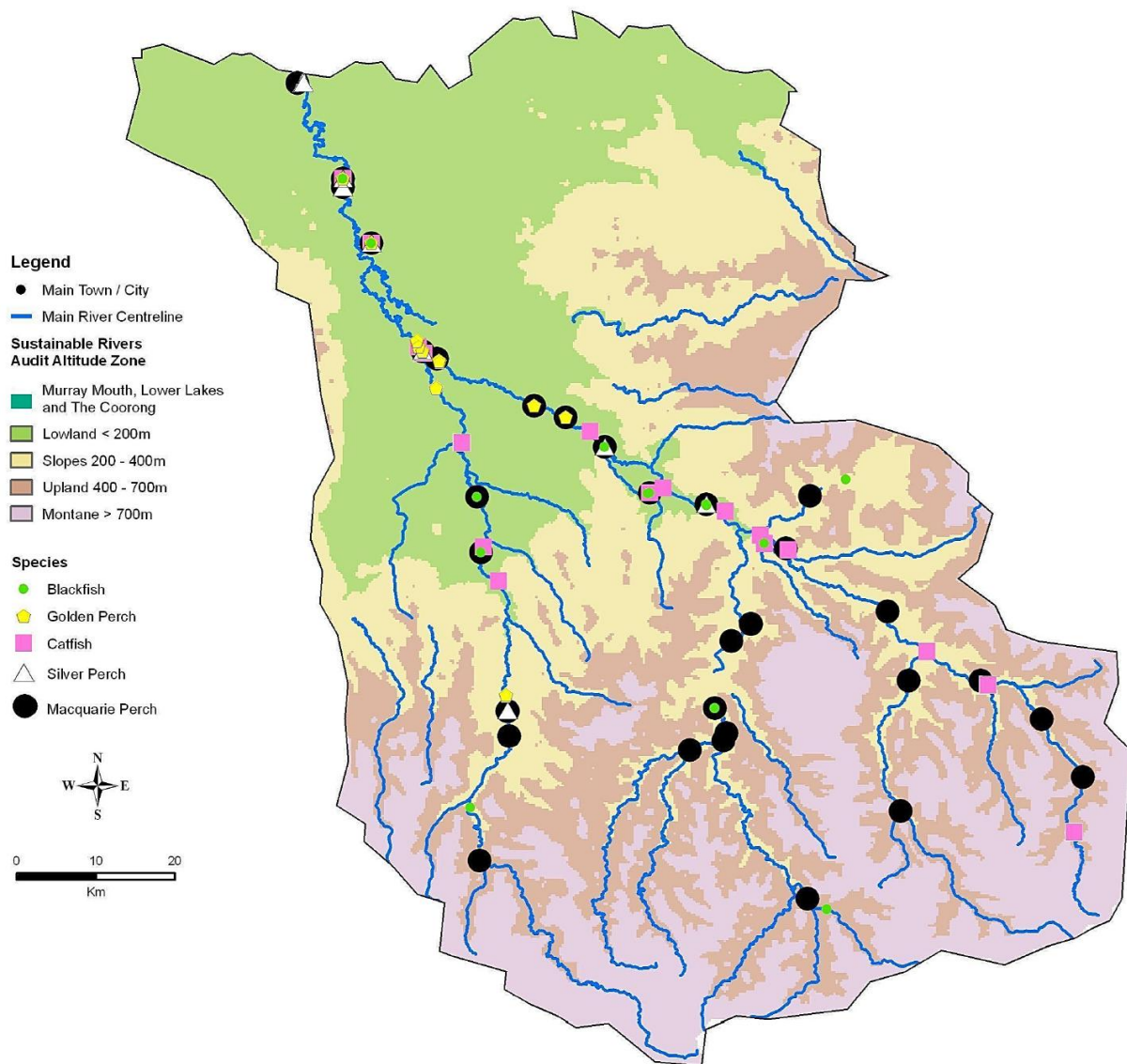


Figure 12.3

Historical Records for Native Fish Species other than Cod in the Ovens River Catchment



Photograph 12.1 Eurobin Catches



These two photographs record captures of species reported to be once common in the Ovens system. The top photo (OR25) is of a 2½ lb. (1.1 kg) Macquarie perch caught from the Ovens River at Eurobin, Christmas 1947. The lower photo (OR26) is of a 5 lb. (2.3 kg) cod in a catch of trout, which from the body markings and head could be a Trout cod, caught in the same area Christmas 1948. Both photographs courtesy of Jim Masters.

Photograph 12.2 Trout Cod from the Buffalo and Ovens Rivers



Left: Photo OR4. Two cod caught by Wally Mitchell one evening on a spinner from the Buffalo River near Dandongdale c1955 in upland habitat. The fish on the left may be a Trout cod based on the features of the head and its very long caudal peduncle. Photo courtesy of Wally Mitchell.

Right: In this photo an unknown angler holds a large Trout cod caught in the Ovens River near Peechelba in 1959. Photo courtesy of the late Lance Wedlick.

Photograph 12.3 Trout Cod from Lake Sambell



Right: Photo OR1. Jack Rhodes holds a 20 inch 'bluenose' angled from Lake Sambell, Beechworth c1948. Jack went on to join the Victoria Fisheries and Game Department as an inspector, recording the recollections of anglers in north eastern Victoria including some who recalled catching Trout cod in past years. Photo courtesy of J. O. Rhodes.

Middle: Photo OR9. A 23½ lb. (10.7 kg) Trout cod caught from Lake Sambell, Beechworth by Roy Holt, 1950. Photo courtesy of Allan Holt.

Right: Bill Surrey of Beechworth holds a 19 lb. (8.6 kg) Trout cod taken from Lake Sambell in February 1969. The story of its capture was reported in the *Ovens and Murray Advertiser* on 13 February 1969 and this photo was published the following week. Note the absence of an eye stripe in this specimen. Photograph courtesy of the *Ovens & Murray Advertiser*.

Photograph 12.4 Suffield Family Catches



Top: Photo OR12. Max Suffield (far left) and his father Gordon (far right) with a catch of Murray cod from the Ovens River near Tarrawingee c1935.

Bottom: Photo OR13. The Suffield family with a catch of Brown trout from the King River near Cheshunt c1945. Max Suffield and Don Burrowes recalled stories of cod and bream having been once common in the upper King River. Don's Grandfather concluded that their rapid decline was a result of trout being introduced to the water. Both photos courtesy of Max Suffield.

Photograph 12.5 Last Trout Cod in the Ovens



Relic populations of Trout cod survived in the Ovens Catchment into the early 1980s, finally disappearing during the severe drought of 1983.

Top: Photo OR21. Local anglers occasionally caught Trout cod between Dandongadale and Abbeyards in the Buffalo River. This fish was captured in 1980 and delivered alive to the Inland Fisheries Research Station at Narrandera.

Bottom: Photo OR20. Max Suffield and other anglers occasionally caught Trout cod in the King River at around the same time. This small specimen was captured by an angler near Cheshunt and given to the author as proof of their continued presence in the King River. Both photos from the author's collection.

12.3 The Changes

12.3.1 *Changes to Native Fish Distribution and Abundance*

In the upland zone, apart from Blackfish, native fish have been scarce for most of the twentieth century with the exception the Buffalo River. There is evidence of their persistence in the upper Ovens and Buckland Rivers until the 1930s, but captures of Macquarie perch and in particular cod, were unusual (Carmody, OH 98; Grattidge, OH 97). In the remote upper King River, oral history indicates that cod and 'bream' were common around 1900 but then rapidly declined so that by the 1920s they were scarce upstream of Whitfield (Burrowes, OH 107; Suffield, OH 108). In the upper Buffalo River bushfires caused a large fish kill in 1914 (*Argus*, 2 February 1914), but good populations of cod and Macquarie perch remained until the 1939 bushfire (Mitchell, OH 100). After the fires, Macquarie perch had recovered by the 1950s but cod, while still regularly taken, were much less common than they had been prior to 1939 (Mitchell, OH 100). In the late 1970s occasional Trout cod were captured from the Buffalo River near Abbeyards, but no further captures took place after the drought of the early 1980s (author's observations; OR21).

In the slopes zone, oral history and newspaper accounts record major declines in native fish populations during the 1930s. Catfish had been reported as being common in lagoons and in the Whorouly Creek in the late 1920s, but by the 1930s had become scarce (Kneebone, OH 101; Carmody, OH 98). A newspaper article reported one angler's observations that billabongs near the Ovens and King Rivers had contained 'plenty of catfish, but now they and the northern rivers and water channels are full of redfin' (*Argus*, 27 March 1936), providing a similar time frame for the loss of Catfish populations. Isolated pockets persisted in some areas until the early 1950s, such as in a lagoon near Rocky Point (Daws, OH 99).

Macquarie perch were reported to have been prolific in the lower slopes zone of the Ovens River in the 1920s, but had disappeared from many areas by the 1940s. By the 1950s the species had become scarce in this zone (Carmody, OH 98; Kneebone, OH 101). Cod populations also declined during the 1930s, with the scarcity of smaller fish being noted (Carmody, OH 98). By World War Two fewer, larger cod of both species were being taken, though the fishing was still considered reasonably good in the Ovens River downstream of Myrtleford, and in the King River downstream of Edi. By the 1970s, the cod fishing was considered fairly poor (Carmody, OH 98; Suffield, OH 108). Occasional captures of Trout cod continued in the King River and the Ovens River near Everton up to the early 1980s (Suffield, OH 108; author's observations; OR20).

In the lowland zone, Langtry captured Macquarie perch from the Ovens River in 1948 (Cadwallader, 1977) but many accounts describe their scarcity compared to past years in lowland areas (*Argus*, 14 January 1939; Carmody, OH 98; Kneebone, OH 101). Langtry recorded that the last captures of Golden perch in this catchment occurred in February 1938, but that Silver perch were still occasionally taken from the Ovens River as late as 1948 (Cadwallader, 1977). During the 1930s in the Boorhaman area, a dramatic decline took place in the abundance of Macquarie perch, Catfish and Blackfish, with Catfish virtually extinct by the 1960s (Gladys Ellis, pers. com.). Good numbers of both cod species were taken into the 1950s, though small fish had become scarce. By the 1970's Trout cod were rare captures (Gladys Ellis & Greg Dunkley, pers. com.).

12.3.2 *Changes to Habitat*

On the upper Ovens, Buckland Rivers and streams in the Beechworth area, the gold rush initiated major changes to the environment. The vegetation was rapidly cleared by the miners (Brough Smith, 1869), and the working of the alluvium brought changes to the streams themselves, including degraded water quality and the destruction of habitat (Howitt, 1855). Late in the nineteenth century bucket dredges commenced operation on

the Ovens River near Harrietville, Myrtleford, and on the Woolshed Creek at Eldorado. The Cocks Eldorado gold dredge ceased operating in 1954 and was the largest in the southern hemisphere (Flett, 1979). The introduction of bucket dredging in the 1880s accelerated the destruction of local streams (Lloyd & Nunn, 1987). The disturbance of the alluvium created mobile silt slugs which progressively filled in holes further downstream in the waterways of the slopes zone. In the lowland zone, well away from the mining activity, sediment from mining on creeks had caused silting of the Ovens River near Wangaratta by 1907 (*Adelaide Advertiser*, 2 May 1907; Victorian Government, 1913). This was noted around 1950 by Langtry who recorded silting of holes from previous mine workings on the Yellow Creek (Cadwallader, 1977). Limited mining had taken place in the Buffalo River catchment and in the King, apart from some small mines near Edi, no significant mining activity occurred (Flett, 1979).

Bushfire events such as those on the Buffalo River in 1914 and 1939 caused major fish kills. Apart from the immediate impacts of runoff, long term degradation of habitat, such as the silting of holes, probably occurred after the fires. This was reported in the Buffalo River after the recent 2003 bush fire (Lyon & O'Connor, 2008). In 1939 the Yarrawonga Weir was completed, isolating fish stocks in the Ovens Catchment from those downstream. Parts of the lower Ovens River were desnagged during the 1890s (*Argus*, 18 December 1890, 24 April 1891, 29 July 1891), with further work being undertaken in the 1930s in the lower Ovens and the Barwidgee Creek (*Argus*, 26 March 1936, 23 September 1939). During the 1940s and 50s, river improvement trusts conducted works in some areas of the slopes zone of the Ovens catchment, notably the King River near Cheshunt, and the Ovens River near Myrtleford. Their activities included snag removal and straightening of the river bed (*Argus*, 5 February 1940; Daws, OH 99; Burrowes, OH 107). Two small impoundments were constructed, Lake Buffalo on the Buffalo River in 1965, and Lake William Hovell on the King River in 1973. While modest in size, these impoundments modified downstream flows, and may have introduced some degree of thermal pollution (Ryan *et al.*, 2001). They also form large insurmountable barriers to upstream fish passage.

Late in the nineteenth century salmonids were introduced to the Ovens Catchment. They rapidly spread throughout much of the upland and slopes zones and were aided by releases from hatcheries (Clements, 1988; Ritchie, 1988). At the time of their introduction to the remote upper King River around 1900, the area had not been settled, mined or cleared, and was only lightly grazed. By the 1920s, cod and Macquarie perch had virtually disappeared from the upper King River, but remained common downstream of Whitfield. The opinion of local residents was that the introduction of trout caused the decline of native fish in the upper King River (Burrowes, OH 107; Suffield, OH 108). The oral history of the impact of trout in the upper King River is supported by newspaper accounts (*Argus*, 5 February 1915; 22 August 1936). One individual directly involved in liberating trout into some north eastern Victorian streams in the 1890s, observed the subsequent disappearance of native perch from some waters that remained in near pristine condition, concluding that trout were responsible (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 June 1928). Langtry, in 1948, considered trout to be a major influence on native fish populations, reporting the predation of Blackfish by trout and a scarcity of cod and bream in areas where trout were abundant in the Ovens Catchment (Cadwallader, 1977).

It appears that Redfin perch first arrived in the Ovens Catchment during the 1920s (Knox, OH 106), gaining access from the Murray River where they were reported at Yarrawonga in 1914 (*Argus*, 26 June 1914). The oral history tells us that they became common throughout the lowland zone and most of the slopes zone by the early 1930s (Knox, OH 106; Kneebone, OH 101). The opinion of local anglers, as well as a newspaper account, was that the arrival of Redfin perch had a serious impact on native fish populations in the lowland and lower slopes zones, coinciding with rapid declines in some native fish populations, particularly Catfish and Macquarie perch (Knox, OH 106; Kneebone, OH 101; *Argus*, 27 March 1936, 22 August 1936). Redfin perch were the main capture from the Ovens River in 1948 as reported by Langtry, who also considered them to be a major problem (Cadwallader, 1977). After the filling of Lake Buffalo during the 1960s Redfin perch, which had been present in

small numbers in the river, proliferated and dominated the storage (Daws, pers. com.). They may be implicated in the subsequent decline of the remnant Macquarie perch population. European carp arrived in the catchment during the 1970s, and progressively spread upstream. While loathed by many anglers, most declines in native fish populations clearly occurred prior to their arrival.

The translocated Trout cod population in Lake Sambell was identified as being important for the conservation of the species by Berra and Weatherly (1972). It has been reported that the population was wiped out by a fish kill in the early 1970s which has never been explained (Trout Cod Recovery Team, 2008). Juvenile Trout cod were fairly common in the lake until the 1950s, but after the introduction of Redfin perch around 1955, they became less common (Jack Rhodes, pers. com.; Holt, OH 102; Lance Jervis, OH 104). Reproduction still occurred, with four juvenile fish being captured from the lake and lodged with the *Australian Museum* in August 1960 (*Australian Museum* database). The *Ovens & Murray Advertiser* of 22 April 1964 reported damage to the outlet tunnel of the lake, necessitating the lowering of the water level to effect repairs. It also outlined plans to raise the retaining wall and expand the lake while water levels were low, enlarging the area of the lake from 28 to 37 acres. With the lowering of the lake, contingency plans for removal of fish by the Fisheries Department were enacted, including the capture of the cod and their retention in tanks until the lake refilled. The rescue of cod was confirmed to the author as having taken place by local residents (Iris Mannik, Lance Jervis, pers.com.).

The *Ovens & Murray Advertiser* of 31 January 1968 reported that the Fisheries Department had suggested that the stable water level of the new lake inhibited the reproduction of the cod. During September 1970 a large fish kill decimated the Trout cod population in Lake Sambell, with fish up to 30 lb. (13.6 kg) being found dead (*Ovens & Murray Advertiser Advertiser*, 12 September 1970). Joe Kraus' account indicates that many dozens of large Trout cod died during the kill, which apparently only affected the cod (Joe Kraus, OH 105; Joe Kraus, pers. com.). Two hypotheses have been suggested by local residents as causing the fish kill. One explanation was that the raising of the water level of the lake flooded old mine tailings, releasing toxic substances which killed the fish. The raising of the water level took place in 1964, well before the kill in 1970. A similar hypothesis touted is that the increased water levels may have caused the death of aquatic vegetation producing eutrophic conditions. From local residents the source of the latter hypothesis appears to be a lowering of the lake in the mid 1970s, which upon its filling resulted in a fish kill in which a few dead cod were seen. This event was of much lower magnitude than the event in 1970 (Iris Mannik, Lance Jervis, pers.com.). While it might have been the coup de grace, the kill that decimated the population in 1970 was a far larger event. The hypothesis touted in the local newspaper that the fish perished by becoming eggbound is not plausible, as cod held in hatchery ponds that fail to spawn resorb oocytes and do not die (author's observations).

The demise of the Trout cod population in Lake Sambell is most likely to have been caused by three or four agents working in succession: - the arrival of Redfin perch in the 1950s; the lowering of the lake in 1964 which probably allowed many smaller fish to escape downstream; the stable water levels in the new lake being less suitable for recruitment; and the 1970 fish kill that probably wiped out most of the population. The most plausible cause of death of the Trout cod in September 1970 is an outbreak of *Chilodonella*, a virulent protozoan parasite which kills cod during the spawning season (Rowland & Ingram, 1991). Subsequent to the 1970 fish kill, a few Trout cod were taken from the lake (*Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 22 April 1971), with the last reported capture being a 16 lb. (7.3 kg) specimen caught by local angler John Rutten in October 1979 (John Rutten, pers. com.).

12.4 The Current Situation

The *Sustainable Rivers Audit* noted in the Ovens catchment that ‘significant numbers of several native species were recorded, including Trout cod, the two blackfish species and Murray cod’. For the two cod species most fish were recorded from the lowland zone, with much fewer larger native fish, apart from Blackfish, being present in the slopes and upland zones. It concluded:

The Ovens Valley fish community was in Poor Condition, with the Upland Zone community in Very Poor Condition. Only 59% of predicted native species were caught; these were only half of the total catch and a quarter of the biomass. The community had lost much of its native species richness and alien fish were abundant (Davies *et al.*, 2008).

Since the 1970s Murray cod have undergone a natural recovery in the Ovens Catchment, more recently aided by hatchery releases. By the 1990s the Murray cod became regular catches downstream of Myrtleford and Whitfield. The factors responsible for their recovery are unclear, as the habitat was not significantly improved. While the species had been stocked, the initiation of the recovery predates those releases. Stockings of Golden perch and later Trout cod have re-established these two species in the catchment. Trout cod are now being regularly caught as far upstream as Porepunkah in the Ovens River, and Whitfield in the King River (Gary Daws, Len Maples, pers. com.). Stockings of juvenile Macquarie perch, as well as translocations of adults from Lake Dartmouth into the upper Buffalo River, supported a small self-supporting population in that water which was severely impacted by the December 2003 bushfire (Lyon & O’Connor, 2008).

While the rivers of the lowland and slopes zones of the Ovens Catchment clearly have potential for re-establishing major populations of native fish, providing uninterrupted passage for fish all the way downstream to the Murray River, the upland zone looks somewhat less promising. The two rivers not containing obstacles in the form of dams, namely the Buckland and upper Ovens, have been degraded by alluvial mining. The other two rivers containing much better habitat, the Buffalo and the King, are fragmented by the presence of dams. These dams prevent the connectivity of habitat important to providing resilience of native fish populations to disturbances such as bushfire and drought.

The Trout cod population in the lowland and slopes habitat of the Ovens River, and the Macquarie perch population in the upland Buffalo River, are of great conservation significance and provide examples, albeit diminished, of the native fish assemblage that once existed in north east Victoria. The Ovens River downstream from Myrtleford, as part of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority’s *Native Fish Strategy*, has been designated as a ‘demonstration reach’ where a range of rehabilitation activities will be conducted with community participation to improve habitat and restore native fish populations.

12.5 Newspaper Highlights

Argus, 30 November 1867

A few mornings since, a school-master in the employment of Mr. James Byrne, farmer, King River, who enjoys the reputation of being a keen disciple of Old Izaak, when engaged fishing in the river near his residence landed a thirty-four-pound cod which had swallowed one of eight pounds, and a fourteen-pound fish which had like-wise an eight-pounder inside, making a total of sixty-one pounds at one haul, with only two hooks.

Argus, 25 January 1871

"We have heard a good deal," says the Ovens Spectator, "of the extraordinary numbers of fish taken out of the Ovens River by the baskets of Mr. Henley's wheel at Oxley, which he uses for lifting water for irrigation purposes. On a recent visit to Mr. Henley's, we witnessed the curious process – one never contemplated by the proprietor, speculative as he is. The buckets are rather deep, and as the fish endeavour to make up the river, they get into them as they pass, evidently to escape the force of the down current, and are thus lifted and emptied with the water into the flume. Large and small keep constantly turning up, and of all kinds, but they generally come in shoals, and we ourselves witnessed in half-an-hour some two dozen fish, chiefly bream, weighing from a few ounces to three and four pounds each. The small ones are of course returned to the river, but believe at least a hundred weight of saleable fish in the 24 hours is the rule and not the exception.

Argus, 16 August 1884

Picturesque Victoria. Myrtleford to Wandiligong. / the clearest river this Buffalo which I have seen in Australia, and as my courteous cicerone, the oldest inhabitant, tells me, it looks made for trout. It is a question, however, if the voracious Murray cod and perch which are in these waters would allow the speckled intruders to live.

Barham Bridge, 14 January 1913

Wangaratta is situated at the confluence of the King and Ovens rivers, and each of these streams was noted for its large fish. About forty five years ago a Chinese, on a day when the thermometer stood stationary 133 degrees in the shade, made a round of the Wangaratta hotels and other places likely to retail fish. "You wanta flesh Mully cod" was his invariable enquiry, and on such a day hotelkeepers and others did want "Mully Cod", provided it was "flesh". The Chinese assured them that the fish was still alive. He booked orders for 10lb here, 8lb there, and so on, until the total was certainly verging on to a hundred weight. Doubts began to assail some of the purchasers, and they demanded that the Chinese should show them his fish. He did so without hesitation. He conducted them to a spot on the bank of one of the rivers, where his cousin was calmly smoking and watching a Murray cod, which had been tethered by a rope passed through a gill and made fast to a sapling on the bank. That fish weighed 120lb when it had been cleaned, and the Chinese triumphantly fulfilled all his orders for "flesh Mully cod".

Argus, 2 February 1914

Charcoal Kills Fish. Bright, Saturday. – An extraordinary experience attended a party of Bright fishermen, who left here on Monday last for a week's fishing on the Buffalo River. After arriving at their destination, a severe thunderstorm occurred, and by Tuesday morning more than 2in. of rain had fallen. The bush fires, which had been burning fiercely around the river hills, were quenched, but the force of the heavy rain drove the charcoal from the burnt trees into the river, and shortly afterwards the charcoal ash began to play havoc with the fish in the river, poisoning them in hundreds, and their dead carcasses, large and small, could be seen floating down the river. The party found it impossible to estimate the number of dead fish seen.

Argus, 5 February 1915

King River Fishing. Sport on the King River, about which "Couta" inquired, appears to be satisfactory. A friend at Lorne, who knows the district thoroughly, told me that cod, bream, and English trout are fairly plentiful from beyond Whitfield up to the Stony Creek. He has taken some nice cod with the spoon. Mr. G. E. Moore, of Wangaratta, says that there is good fishing (cod, bream, and perch) in the King and in the Ovens quite close to Wangaratta.

Argus, 14 December 1917

Catfish Spikes. "T.B." (Elwood) says that recently a fisherman who had just caught a catfish in a branch of the King River, near Oxley, told him that they should be handled with care, as a prick from their spikes was exceedingly painful and irritating.

Argus, 26 December 1917.

Movements On Land. "T.D." says that Mr. Jarman's note on the catfish coming out of the water to feed, encourages him to repeat a story told to him by an Oxley resident. One summer he saw about a dozen fine catfish in a pool which was rapidly drying up, near the King River. Next morning he went down with a bag to secure the catfish, but they were not there, and a careful search showed no trace of them. His theory was that they had "walked" over the bank into the next hole, which was still connected with the river, but that at the time he felt too dubious about the story to mention it."

Argus, 13 March 1925

Wangaratta. / Mr. A. H. Smith caught a golden perch in the King River, weighing 7¾lb. The weight is a record for a fish of this species.

Argus, 17 March 1926

Bright. / T. Forrester, of Bright, landed a cod 18lb. in weight from Morse's Creek, at the rear of the Alpine Park, Bright. From the Ovens River many fish, ranging from 6lb. to 15lb., have been taken.

Argus, 22 August 1936

How to Preserve Murray Cod. / The chief inspector of the Fisheries and Game Department (Mr. Lewis) says that trout have not been introduced into any waters that are suitable for Murray cod. I think he is mistaken. The Waranga Basin is cod water, and trout were put in there more than 30 years ago. It boasted the best fresh-water fishing for cod, bream, and golden perch, but now you can fish there with rod and line and you will be lucky if you get a cod in a week. Redfins are there in thousands, also a lot of trout. Mr. Lewis says that trout have been introduced into the mountainous North-East streams. I know to my sorrow that Whitfield used to be good fishing for cod, bream, and golden perch, anywhere from the junction of the Murray and Ovens rivers, also from the junction of the Ovens and King rivers, but now it is the dry old redfins and trout. The only way to keep our cod is to destroy the redfins and trout. I heard of a trout being caught with nine small cod, about 1in. in length, in it. It is only in the last few years that trout have been caught in Wangaratta. Redfins are caught in thousands here in the lagoons and in the King River, the Ovens River, and Yellow Creek. I have caught more than 30 redfins a day. Destroy the trout and redfins and we will have cod, bream, and golden perch.

Argus, 14 January 1939

Angling Notes. / About 30 members of the Essendon Club visited Ramond, at the Junction of the Ovens and Murray rivers, and had fair sport despite the low water. The heaviest cod, 21lb., was caught by J. Smith, and the heaviest grunter, 7lb., by T. Barrell. Macquarie perch were scarce.

12.6 Ovens River Catchment Oral Histories

The following oral histories (OH 96-109) mostly discuss the Ovens River Catchment.

OH 96

The Late Bert McKenzie of Ruffy was interviewed in July 1982 at an age of 82 years.

(From Trueman & Luker, 1992)

I fished the Buffalo River at Myrtleford. Like a lot of other streams it was all silted with shallow pools and you could wade through them. You would wade up and you wouldn't see a fish in the day time. We had our tent right on the edge of the water. We heard fish playing around in the shade of the trees. We set a line there and got Macquaries and a couple of cod. I would say they were Trout cod but it's a long time ago¹. That would have been 1932 actually. I only had two lines set there and there was sometimes two fish on the lines but always one. They were beautiful eating. I had the trout rod with me but you could not get anything in the daytime or see anything. But they were there.

Footnote: In the first meeting with the author the previous week Bert indicated that he fished the Buffalo River at Nug Nug and further upstream. In the Nug Nug area he reported catching both types of cod whereas further upstream he stated that the majority of the cod taken were Trout cod.

OH 97

Walter Grattidge of Myrtleford was interviewed in January 2007 at an age of 95 years.

I arrived in Myrtleford in 1928; we come as a family from Bacchus Marsh. We used to fish the Goulburn, camp up the river from Tallarook. In the river there we used to get both the Murray cod and the other type which we called a 'Pike cod'. The Pike cod had a different head, it looked savage, it had a long sharp head, big eyes. The colour was sort of grey and it had a pattern, lines and spots on it. They were in the Goulburn, my dad would camp at McCormick's out towards Tallarook, and we caught plenty of them there. There was a cod caught where we camped, on the Goulburn, by Mick Davey a pro, there on one of the nightlines. And it had a greyhound pup in it.

The people here told me in the Valley Creek, they said there was a lot of cod there in the real old days, but I caught a few. In the Barwidgee Creek, it was full of cod and bream in the early days. In Myrtleford, there was plenty of cod here, early on there was a lot of them, and not real big, from about 1930-40, they were common about 14-15 pound, with an odd one bigger. And the Pike cod were here too, my word they were, plenty, the most common, but both types. The depression bugged them, they all started fishing and catching rabbits to eat. Later on, after the war, they were fewer and bigger. I more or less fished mainly around Ovens, though I know the cod, odd ones, were being caught up around Eurobin in a big hole. I got bream, the Macquarie perch, and I got them a couple of times in the Valley Creek, as well as a 13 pound and a 17 pound cod. I caught bream in the Buckland near Walsh's, below the big cliffs, that's up past Porepunkah, about 4 mile up. We went up one Sunday; we caught half a dozen of them. A bloke told us he could get a dozen of them up there anytime. That was just after I was married, about 1934. The ones we got, they'd be a pound and a half.

The Catfish is one of the best eating freshwater fish, a 2 pound Catfish would give you more eating than any other fish at that size. I caught them in the lagoons at the Rose White, that's the Valley Creek. I never saw yellowbelly around here, only after they put them in the dam here. I've caught plenty out of the Yanco, they're good eating. I never saw grunter here, no. Dad used to go somewhere down in a big lagoon near Whorouly, there he caught grunter. Down there, there was a lot of Catfish in the lagoons down there. The redfin there, they bugged them up at Doug's place, Doug Hamilton. There was good water down there; yes there was a lot

of Catfish down there, and some grunter. And some tiger snakes! The redfin, they just landed, well one came in and one went out, prior to that there was lots of Catfish.

In the Buffalo River the cod were very dark. At Dandongadale, at the SEC line, that's where I caught cod in the Buffalo. We once took a boat up there and rode it down. We got 3 one night, not one over 3 pound, you would catch a trout up there too. Way up the river, near the scout camp, you could see the cod lying in there, 5 to 6 miles up past Dandongadale. Although I never caught them, there were bream all the way up the Buffalo. Wally Mitchell told me how he used to be able to catch a bream any time, after the cows crossed the river, that stirred them up! When he told me that, it would have been 50 years ago, and he was fishing for them 30 years before that. I saw him pull a drum net out, full of them, up near Abbeyards.

The Cudgewa Creek, I had a friend that had a farm up there, we quite often got a cod 14 to 15 pound. They were definitely the Pike cod, that's all we caught out of the Cudgewa at the time, that would be well over 30 years ago, more like 50 years ago, at least. The Kiewa, there was a power of fish in it; I used to fish it near Dederang. The cod out there before the fires, they had no green in them, they were more the colour of the greasies, silvery, had blue in them, Pike cod they were. They were lovely eating cod out of the Kiewa. This old chap, Kurt Case was out there when it happened, he told me there was a big bushfire and a storm, it washed all the ash in, that was in 39. Well it killed everything; the fish were far too gone to eat. The next year we caught little cod, Murray cod, all less than 3 pound, that was just below Dederang. After the fires well years later there were some big ones caught, up to 90 pound, and a lot of trout.

We used to use the old carp for bait. If we couldn't get a carp we would use yabbies, but carp were the best bait. And small redfin about 6 inches long, they're good bait, but don't last on the hook long. The cod bit best after the first flush of water in autumn, but you could catch them all year round, though they don't bite as much in winter. Back then I could get a cod pretty well when I wanted one, about 7-8 pound. I did a lot of cross lining in New South Wales and we would never get the cod out in the middle. The blokes that knew set them along the banks. Some blokes did a lot of spinning, they would stir them up, then I would catch them.

In the Rose White there were a lot of trout, I got one 7 pound, gave him to the bank manager. Stewart Cambell got one 8½ pound. I saw one 13¼ pound trout out of the creek; he was shot by the brother in law, Mick Broadbent. He borrowed my 303. He rang me up, told me to come along to see a decent fish. It was 32 inches long, 9 inches deep. The top of the Buffalo River never changes, it all rock. I remember old Eddie Walker, from the Ovens River Trust; they pulled all the old logs out. Well the holes filled up. That buggered some good cod holes in the Ovens.

OH 98

Bert Carmody of Wangaratta was interviewed in December 2007 at an age of 90 years.

I was born in 1917, at Whorouly. My father didn't fish much himself, he spent a lot of his time breaking horses, so did I, so I got to see a bit of the district, Bright, Everton, Moyhu, Whitfield. He wasn't a fisherman really, but he would take us fishing, I was keen on the fishing. I was fishing continuously through the 30s to the 50s, did some a bit before, been a fisherman all my life. Around Everton in the Ovens we used to catch the two types of cod, the Murray cod and a second type. He's got a different head, there was quite a different look about them, they didn't look as thick as the old cod. They had a pointier nose, a sharper build altogether. More spotted too, and generally grey or dull green. They were more in the faster water. When I was young I caught quite a lot of them, they're protected now.

Redge Tanner in Myrtleford had a wireless shop, he used to fish with me, at Everton, and Gapsted. At Everton you'd catch as many of the other type of cod as the normal Murray cod, perhaps more, and at Gapsted in the

faster water there was even more of them. That was in the early to mid-30s. I caught the different headed cod up to 30 pound, but mostly a lot smaller. I caught them at the time in the King as well, in Billy Sam's near Moyhu, near Whitfield too, and a lot in the Ovens at Everton. When I was young I thought they were the female cod, I thought it was strange that there were so many females in the King! But they were called by people a rock cod, they knew the difference. What they now call a Trout cod was back then the rock cod, I've seen them caught in recent years, it's the same fish, there's no mistaking them.

At Everton we used to catch a lot of bream, and you'd catch the redfin. The last of the bream I seen was up in the Buffalo River, they were a very sweet fish to eat. They were quite common back then, if you caught one you caught quite a few, they seemed to go round in shoals. We lived on the Buffalo River for 10 years, at Nug Nug, around the 1940s, then we shifted to Gapsted in 51. I knew the Mitchells, further up the river. We caught cod in the Buffalo, not real big ones, a big one was 14 to 20 pounds, both types of cod, 'bout the same number of each, at Nug Nug, they were fairly common. At the time there was an odd cod in the Dandongadale and a few bream about the Rose junction, but mainly trout.

We drove cattle up there for 6 years, up to Abbeyards and the Catherine Station. Up there at Abbeyards you would catch scores of trout, a bagful before dusk any night, and an odd cod, and the bream and a very odd redfin. There was less cod there than at Nug Nug. What type of cod? Very few Murray cod, mostly the other type, the rock cod. I am absolutely sure of that, an odd Murray cod and fairly regularly the other type, but I wouldn't say that the cod were thick on up there, though I was told at the time that they had been common in the past, that cod and bream had been caught in the bottom of the Catherine River, on the station. That was back during the Great War that the cod were common up there. When I was up there we didn't catch a lot of cod, you'd catch them in with the trout. The old trout up there kept most of the other fish away they are a cannibal and not fussy about what they ate. We'd catch most of the big trout up there by setting a greasy on a line.

The old trout took over the top end of the Ovens too. When I was young I heard of them catching cod right in Bright, the last of them, and past there. There was a cod hole up near Germantown, they were gone when I was about, but they were still getting a few a bit before. And in the Buckland. I never fished the Buckland, but the older blokes were talking about it in the past years, the early 1900s, up around the old diggings, they caught quite a few, and they still caught a few in the bottom end, it was a good clear stream. That was in the 20s when they were still catching cod there, when I was a boy and they were talking about it, I'm certain of that. The highest up I saw cod caught myself was at Porepunkah, in the 30s, by then they were getting scarce up there. I saw a couple caught there, and they were rock cod, I wasn't fishing up there much, more further down the river, but I saw the fish, I know what they were.

The bream, pound and half to two pound was the average, you'd catch them on worms, 3 to 4 pound was a big one, they weren't a very big fish. We'd catch the bream in the King, around Docker and Moyhu, and in the Ovens, in the early days they were caught right along the Ovens, anywhere, up past Bright, as a boy I heard of them being nearly up to Harrietville, and in the Buckland up to the diggings. The bream were getting scarce by 1945 to 50. There was still a few round in the little shoals, but they had disappeared too. The greasies were everywhere, bloody greasies, they were very sweet to eat, they'd get a foot long, in the Ovens, the King, in a lot of the backwaters, if you caught one greasy you caught ten. We'd catch them later on for bait out of the Hurdle Creek; you'd catch them as fast as you could throw a line in.

The yellowbelly, well I never, ever saw a yellowbelly, at Everton, Gapsted, the King, never saw one. And the grunter, I never caught one myself but I did hear from time to time of blokes catching a few around Everton, but I never saw one. That was in the 30s that they caught them, never heard of them after that. I remember the

Catfish well; if you got a 4 to 5 pound Catfish you'd think you had a 20 pound cod on, Christ they could fight! You'd catch them anywhere round the lagoons, there were a lot in the big lagoons around Whorouly, and I know they got them at Everton, Moyhu, Myrtleford, as far up as Porepunkah in the lagoons. That was back in the 30s. They were good eating. My mother was a good fisherman, she would get them out of Whorouly Creek when we were small, she would always be cooking Catfish. Yes, they were in both the King and the Ovens, in the backwaters in those rivers. The Catfish disappeared, a fair bit of my married life, after I married Alice, I never caught one, they went quick, never caught one after about 1932, before that you could always catch them in the Whorouly Creek, it was a reedy creek, ideal for them.

When we moved to Gapsted in 51 the fishing had changed. It was still good for cod, less of them but big ones. The rock cod were still around, though not as common, and the bream were by then a bit unusual. But it was still good fishing. I caught a 112 pound cod at the Pioneer Bridge at Everton back in the early fifties and plenty of 60 to 70 pounders. The big cod we'd get on the silver carp, and the red carp, we'd drag them out of the lagoons, not the mongrel carp you'd get now.

OH 99

Gary Daws of Rocky Point was interviewed in January 2007 at an age of 56 years.

I was born in Echuca, grew up at Gunbower, mum's family grew up around Gunbower. My old man was a fanatical fisherman and so was my mother. I came here in 1969, the first fish I ever caught here, on a celta spinner, was a 9 pound Murray cod. It was my revelation; I thought it was trout water! I got to know a lot of the old blokes that fished this stretch, heard their stories. There was very few fishing for cod in the 70s, we more or less had a hole each, there was three of us from here to Rocky Point. The river has changed that much, its static level has dropped maybe 4 feet. It's silted a bit, but the summer levels are lower. Back then, when I first came here, there were less cod but they were bigger. About 1983 there was 43 cod taken out of one hole in one season, the Rocky Point hole, that's when they started to get more common. The 74 flood did a lot of damage to that hole; it widened it, the gravel washed out of the banks. The 93 flood exacerbated that, it removed a lot of structure out of the main part of the hole and it silted up further down.

Below Rocky point my father-in-law, Pam's father, Abe Phillips; he always had a drum net in near a big log. He said at times he would curse this drum net because he was trying to get cod and it would be full of small grunter. That would happen only at certain times of the year. That would be back in the late 20s and early 30s. They weren't Macquarie perch, he knew the difference, he caught them as well. I caught one down here at Rocky Point 2 years ago, a grunter; he was as black as ink. As late as the early 1950s there were Catfish here in the lagoons at Rocky Point, old Abe told me. There was a lagoon that ran through an old fella's property here in the paddock near the road; they were common in that lagoon, that was the last place. He said as the redfin became more prolific the Catfish just disappeared. I never remember about anybody telling me about yellowbelly here, Macquaries and grunter yes, as well as the cod. The population of Blackfish here was phenomenal.

My mother in law was born and bred at Dandongadale. She told me that the most prolific fish in the Buffalo were the Macquarie perch, but there were cod up there too. That was pre-World War 2, in the 30s. There are some now up the river, well above the scout camp. I camped up there 2 years ago and in the decent holes there were decent maccas in them. They would follow the lures, but wouldn't take it, the best one would have been 3 pound. I walked up to Camp creek and they were right up there. Just before the dam was built, there were maccas still in good numbers in the upper Buffalo. Old Sam Lewis talked about all the cod that were in the Buffalo before the dam.

The biggest Silver perch I've seen, my old man got one that was 9 pound, out of the Murray, below Torrumbarry, for my sister's wedding in 1959. I'll never forget it, I had all my worms taken by the little ones, and he got this huge thing! It was good eating, how you handled them was important for the eating. When we were kids we would fish on the sandbanks there, we would mainly get Silver perch, they would knock off the worms, but we also got yellowbelly and small cod. The Silver perch, the little ones were shocking, there was so many of them!

My old man caught a lot of cod below Torrumbarry, but 3 or 4 times he caught a bluenose. I can remember him saying it to me, he was pretty much matter of fact about it, that was in the late 50s. They were there, but not in numbers, they knew what they were, but they were not commonly caught. I remember the first one I saw him catch, he couldn't get this bloody thing up, it was close to 30 pounds. He would get it up near the boat, it would go back straight to the bottom, it just wouldn't give up. The bluenose, they wouldn't capitulate at all, he was sometimes disappointed because they weren't as big as he thought they would be. That was a phenomenal fish, the others he caught there would have been under 10 pound. They put them here in the Buffalo Creek and at the time there was a lot of poaching and spotlighting that went on, they got them.

The old man, he would drag chains over the logs to wake up the cod, and then drag the area with an aeroplane spinner. He caught one yellowbelly, trolling for cod on an aeroplane spinner, about 1958, it was like a giant football, it weighed 34 pound. That was around Katy Malone's Bend, about 5-6 kilometres below Torrumbarry, he liked that bend a lot. I don't remember catching Catfish then in the river itself, but near Master's Bend there was a creek or a channel that always had Catfish in it. It ran into Pig swamp. And the Gunbower Creek always had Catfish in it; they were easy to catch with a beer bottle, a bit of string, a worm dropped off along the edge of the cumbungi. They were generally about 1 – 2 pound, got an odd one up to 4 pound. They are just the best eating!

OH 100

Wally Mitchell of Mongans Bridge, formerly of Dandongadale was interviewed in July 2007 at an age of 74 years.

I'm 74 years old, bred on the Buffalo, about 5 miles up from where the dam wall is now. The fish well in the past I knew from my parents they used to catch plenty. The cod they used to go right to the top of Abbeyard. My father was with the CRB when they pushed the first road up into Abbeyards, there was a hundred and thirty men, he told me that they caught enough cod there to feed all the men, in one night. It really is a small river, so it tells you how common they were. That was about 1920 odd. The 39 fires killed a lot of cod, nearly killed all of them. I can remember the cod floating down the river, big white bellies. The largest cod that I caught was 30 pounds; nearly all the fish caught was with a single propeller spinner with white feathers over triple hooks.

The bream were common, we used to stand on the rocks, would drop our lines down, nothing fancy like the nylon lines these days, just a hook and green line and a worm. There was a crack in one rock, where it went straight down, you could see the bream hiding in there. The bream, we used to get three to four pounders, they were beautiful, very deep fish, and pretty good to eat. The average size of the bream I would put down to ½ to ¾ pounds. The bream were up at Abbeyard and I think they went up a lot further. The slimies, oh yeah, there was a lot of them. I caught one 18 inches long; I thought it looked like an eel. They were sweet, heaps of them, most weren't that big, about 6 to 10 inches long. You don't scale them, just straight in the pan. I cannot recall any Catfish in the Buffalo and never heard anyone mention them. We caught bream and cod in the summer and early autumn, the bream during the day and evening and cod in the evening. The best time was when there was a storm brewing with lightning and thunder

There was heaps of trout, we used to go down and get a feed anytime. I remember we went down to the Nug Nug picnic about eight miles away, everyone did. While we were away some people came to our big rocky hole and blew it up. When we came home and milked the cows we were having tea and we heard a truck pull up at the bridge. We did not know what had happened until the next day as that is when we found all the dead fish in the hole and they kept rising to the surface for a week. They blew the whole lot up, well the trout the next week there were 3 to 4 pounders floating up. We never found any bream which was very strange as there were a lot of them in there but we never caught any more in that hole again.

The Rose River was never a brilliant river to fish in, in summer it turns into holes, full of leaves and stops running. The Dandongadale was a better river used to get trout in both, it kept running, also the Buffalo River. My cousin Lawrence and I were fishing in the Buffalo one day. We chucked our lines out and was having lunch when we both got a bite. We both had a fish on. The trouble was we both had the same trout on! He got the big cod in the newspaper where the Rose ran into the Buffalo. By the time we got flooded out by the dam, the cod they were really coming back. I got a 25 pounder and a 15 pounder on a cod spinner one night. We got flooded out by the Buffalo Dam and had to leave, otherwise we would never have left.

OH 101

Bing Kneebone of Whorouly was interviewed in December 2006 at an age of 76 years.

I can remember old Dave Brown, an ex-butcher, used to bring the cod home on a pushbike, used sparrows for bait. He would get them with a shanghai, then pluck them. That was out on the river here, at Whorouly. In the Whorouly Creek, it used to be full of Catfish, in the 40s; we used to catch them, used to get them up to 5-6 pounds. They were plentiful, common around 3 pound, that would be a good average size. And the bream, in the creek too, the Macquaries, before the redfin got in. We used to catch the bream, catchem around 2 pound, under the Willow trees with a floater and a Stringybark sapling. Got odd ones up around 3-4 pound, they were bloody good eating! After the bushfires, well it wiped both of them out, and the redfin. The big rains after the fires washed in the ash, the fish were swimming on top of the water gulping for air. Once the reddies got in they seemed to wipe everything out.

We used to catch the little greasies, stacks of them, up to a foot long. That's in the creek, and I caught a few cod out of it too, you only got them out of there up to 8-9 pound, though old Sherridan got a big one in Basil's hole. Jack Dick from Wangaratta got a Murray cod that was caught up in the mesh of his gate, during a flood. That was a good story! I've never ever caught yellowbelly here in the past, I fished the Ovens a lot, it was only 4 to 5 years ago I caught my first one here. In the old days you never saw them up here, further down yes, a few, but not up here. We caught an odd yellowbelly around Wangaratta. They used to go behind the showgrounds in the old days on the sandbars and caught good yellowbelly.

I once got a 76 pound Trout cod, years ago, below Yarrawonga; I wasn't too sure what it was. I showed the photo to Pat Sheridan, the inspector, and he identified it. He told me "You should know what they are, they're in the Ovens!" Before they put the Buffalo Dam in, they used to get a lot of cod up past Dandongadale. Years ago they pulled the big old snags out. The old holes, below the bridge here, they filled up with gravel, now you can walk around it.

OH 102

Geoff Holt of Beechworth was interviewed in October 2006

My father (Roy Holt) knew that there were two types of cod, but believed that only the one type, the Trout cod, was present in Lake Sambell. His biggest was a 50 pounder, caught around 1952. In the morning he caught one that was 21 pound and went back that night and caught the big one. He caught good ones every year, always caught some from 20 to 30 pound each year. He fished for the big ones, and always caught them on bait such

as yabbies or worms. The smaller ones were good to eat, but that big one he sold as he thought it would be too fatty. There are still cod in the lake, in the last few years I know of someone that bumped into a big one when they went diving in there.

Back in Lake Sambell in the forties and into the fifties there were mainly the Trout cod and the greasies. We would occasionally catch small cod that we threw back. They did put trout in but they never did any good, there would only be a few caught. When we were kids fishing in the lake there were no redfin, they would have arrived sometime in the fifties. He used to get the Trout cod in other places, he did catch a lot at Docker out near Moyhu, that would have been in the mid to late forties, he caught a couple of nice ones there that would have been in the twenties (pounds). Back then he had an old Dodge car; we had to push it all the time to get it started. He used to catch Trout cod down between Everton and Tarrawingee on a property that would let him in, they were anything from 8 pound on. There was a few Golden perch caught there, up to about 3 pound. The Macquarie perch by then were scarce; I don't recall catching a lot of them there. The redfin were explosive in the late forties and early fifties, at Brimin, in the Ovens. We got sick of catching them, even though they were good eating, you would have two hooks and you would get two of them. Now you hardly ever see them.

OH 103

Allan Holt of Beechworth was interviewed in October 2006.

The biggest Trout cod my father got out of the lake went just over 50 pound. He had got one 21 pound that morning and got the big one that night. He said the cod in Lake Sambell were Trout cod, he knew about them because he used to go to other spots to catch them. We used to go camping with our father on the Buffalo, camp at Abbeyard, and further down. He used to catch both trout and the Trout cod together up there in the Buffalo, that would have been in the late forties. He also mentioned I think catching Trout cod up at Cheshunt, but that would have been a long time ago, and that he used to get a few Trout cod at Peechelba, but mainly Murray cod there. That would have been the early forties when he talked about catching them there. In the sixties he fished the Kiewa, that was the Murray cod he got there. And Brimin on the Murray, he said he caught a few Trout cod there, but mainly Murray cod. He always said that in most places you got mainly one sort of cod or the other, that one would dominate. The only place he ever talked about catching good numbers of both Murray cod and Trout cod was at Cobram, you got the two types of cod together there.

OH 104

Lance Jervis of Beechworth was interviewed in October 2006.

As a teenager I fished in Lake Sambell. We caught numerous small cod in the lake fishing with worms and wood grubs. They were around half a pound or so. That was in the early fifties. We just called them Murray cod. I remember Jeff and Allan Holt's father, Roy Holt, catching big ones out of the lake, certainly up to 50 pound and other big fish. The lake used to supply water to the tannery on the other side of town. There was a tunnel under the town that drew down the water. About 1960 the creek was diverted into the lake, to keep it full. It was about then that the small cod disappeared.

OH 105

Joe Krauss of Beechworth was interviewed in October 2006 at 52 years of age.

I saw a cod caught in the lake about 36 years ago, it was weighed and was 68 pound. There were odd ones caught from time to time. About 1969 they were floating in the lake dying and blown up, but not dead. That was about the first time I ever saw them, floating to the top upside down. The theory was that the Trout cod hadn't been able to spawn for a few years and it killed them. They were still alive when we dragged them out, many of them 25-30 pounders at least. We must have dragged about 40 out of the water and hung them up in the trees. There were dozens and dozens of them.

Prior to that I hadn't caught a cod, though I had been broken off a few times, got towed around. There have been a few photos of them in the local newspaper, the Ovens and Murray Advertiser. The last one was at least 15 years ago. It was caught by John Rutten and was 16 pound. There was a report of two small ones caught recently, in the last few weeks.

OH 106

Tom Knox of Wangaratta was interviewed in October 2006 at 93 years of age.

I was born in Wangaratta, on the river, in town. The bream were in plague proportions. Back then they weren't known as Macquarie perch. In the early morning you could see them swimming around. You could catch them on worms, any amount off the sandbanks. There wasn't a lot of interest in them. That's 70, maybe closer to 80 years ago. They were up to a couple of pound. And they used to go right up to at least Whitfield in the King. I caught them up there. We were coming back from trout fishing and we pulled in at Fletchers Bridge on the Buffalo. You could see the bream swimming around in the rock holes above the bridge, near where the Buffalo dam now is. The water was that clear, you know it was the mountain water. They wouldn't come near a line with a sinker. We threw in lines with worms and they would suck on it and you wouldn't see the line move. We caught three or four up to about 2 pounds. Went back a few times, but they were hard to catch.

The Catfish were here, in the big lagoons. There is none left of those big lagoons due to all the levy banks. There was plenty of them, up to 2 ½ pounds, but none since I was young. I used to fish the Horseshoe lagoon in the police paddock here. We had beer bottles with a cork in them with a line, baited up with worms. That's how we caught the Catfish. The grunters were in the Ovens. They were around, but not very common. If you got one you got a few. They were up to about 2 pound. They just disappeared. I used to catch them at the lock at Torrumbarry, you could fill an icebox with them, but they weren't much good to eat. The yellowbellies, well we never caught many in the river. There were more yellowbellies in the lagoons. There's more now in the river from the stocking than back then when I was young.

The cod in the Ovens they went up to at least Myrtleford. There was plenty of them up that far. And they went right up the King to Cheshunt, though not as common as further down. My best cod out of the Ovens was 90 pound; it was taken by angling on a bardy grub. That was back about 1980. When I was young there was plenty of them, plenty of big ones. We used to set lots of night lines back then, that's how we got them. We'd go down the river with 30 set lines. Back then you hardly saw anyone on the river. Not like today, there are boats everywhere! Got a few 40 and 50 pounders. I had the first motorboat, had it out at Bundalong. When Mulwala first filled, for the first 5, 6, 7 years, I used to go out with the old propeller spinner. That's the aeroplane spinner. You had no trouble catching 14 – 20 cod a day. They were all the normal Murray cod. We got the Trout cod in the river here, though we didn't call them that back then. We just thought they were some funny looking cod, a strange cod. I might of heard of them being called a bluenose. They certainly had a blue colour about them. They were not as common as the Murray cod. The biggest ones were about 9 or 10 pound.

When I was young there were no redfin back then. The first redfin I saw was taken from the 3-mile creek. It was on display in Lindner's Jewellery store when I was a kid. It was in a jar in a window with a label, "English perch". It was a novelty. Then they exploded, they took over everywhere.

OH 107

Don Burrowes of Claremont was interviewed in August 2007 at an age of 81 years.

I'm 81, been on the King River all my life. I grew up on the last place on the eastern side way up the King, about 4 miles before where the dam is. It was the late 1800s when my grandfather Ted Burrowes settled up there, then my father Frank Burrowes took the place on. The cod they were up there before my time. My grandfather told me he used to go up there above where William Hovell is and catch cod. About half way between the dam

wall and Evan's Creek, it was called the 'Gun Hole'. Apparently somebody dropped a gun in it and they couldn't find it, it was a deep rocky hole, and very dark. He told me they were common there, cod and bream, and good cod up to twenty pound, but not big. The cod, there was plenty of them; there was no need to travel they could catch them there and right down the river to our home, any amount of them. From what I remember they caught them up to 40 pound at home, they didn't have to go any further to get them. When they introduced the trout in 1903 he said it pushed them out, he had absolutely no doubt about it, it was pretty quick. He said they released the trout in the early 1900s and they took over. And took over they did well, it was suggested that the King River was one of the best trout streams in Victoria. I've always been a trout fisherman but it's just a plain fact, the trout pushed the cod, and the bream, out of the top of the King.

I started fishing when I was 6 on our property, I can remember it. All I had was a bamboo pole and a piece of string and a hook. It was baited up with a wood grub and I caught a trout of 2 pound. We only lived a 100 meters from the river. By my time it was nearly all trout. When I was a boy we did catch an odd cod after the trout were put in, every 4 or 5 years. Never saw a bream there, by then they weren't much up past Whitfield. There was a lot of slimies around. For night fishing we used to use the slimies for bait. They are still here but not so thick as back then. My mother talked about catching the Blackfish in all the creeks on a bent pin. The frogs used to be around then, we used to light a big fire, put a frog out, and all of a sudden there would be a tug, tug with a trout on the line. It took us a while to work out that the trout used to take the frog down the hole before he'd swallow it. Now you don't see the frogs at all.

There was a lot of bream caught from Whitfield north and a lot of crays. When I was fishing up until the 1940s there was a lot of crays in the river, they were right up to the 'Top Crossing', and above. I used to go up there and catch beautiful trout, early on there was a lot of rainbows, used to catch them on the fly. In the grasshopper season they'd go on them, but they were fussy, if they were feeding on the brown grasshopper that's all they would take. You could put a green grasshopper on your hook and they wouldn't look at it. You could see big browns, up to five pound, lying in the pools. The Dandongadale was another good stream, but the Rose it used to stop running, fill up with leaves.

Later on I moved down the river to here. The Catfish were here in Moyhu, they used to catch them in this lagoon here (Claremont), the Gibb family my parents in law talked about them, way back in the 1880s then there was a flood and the river changed course. I didn't catch them but others did. About 1948-50 I was driving a school bus and we used to catch beautiful redfin about 2 ½ pound round Targoora, in behind Webb's place. You don't hear of them now. But the cod are here they're catching them and the Trout cod.

The river well in the 1950s they put a bulldozer in the river here from the top end all the way through, pulled the snags out. The next flood filled the holes in. It used to take a flood 4 days to get to Wangaratta, now it takes half a day. The tobacco growers used to wash the bag that had the DDT in the river. And there was the other chemicals. Years ago I used to go fishing up at the 'Top Crossing', up around Pineapple Flat and you would see all the grasshoppers, now you hardly see them. The access has allowed a lot of people to get up to the breeding streams for the trout and there is no stocking.

As far as the fishing goes if they're going to bring the natives back then they should do it properly. Stock the King properly with the Trout cod and the bream, put the snags in and fix the river. I've always loved my trout fishing but I'm for them bringing the cod and bream back to the King as long as they create good fishing for them. The way it is at the moment we don't have good fishing for the trout, and the native fish, the Trout cod and the bream they're protected.

OH 108

Max Suffield of Moyhu was interviewed in December 2007 at an age of 78 years.

I was born, sired there in Tarrawingee, I'm 78. My father, in the Ovens, my father caught both the Murray cod and the Trout cod. The Trout cod he called a 'King cod'; because he said there was a lot of them in the King, more than the Murray cod, that was in the 1930s. I caught them myself, oh hell yes, back in the 30s from when I was 5 or 6 years old, at Tarrawingee, and Yellow Creek, they were in there, and at Targoora. We'd go out on pushbikes, there was a lot there. We didn't weigh them, and we never caught little ones, they were up to about 13 pound. They got scarce but never died out of the King, there was odd ones around till they started stocking them. We come here, in Moyhu, in 1969 and there were very odd ones being caught.

The bream, we caught in the Ovens at Tarrawingee and at 'the Walnuts' in Wang, they'd be most about a pound, we never caught big fellas, if you caught one you caught a dozen. The yellowbelly, there was only the odd one where we fished; there was a few more down the river below where we used to go. The grunter, never saw one out of any of the rivers when I fished. The Catfish we caught a few, not many, in the Ovens, mainly around Wang, we used to catch a few in behind the Sydney Hotel. The redfin were common when I was a boy, you could catch them anywhere, rivers, creeks, private dams. When it flooded they'd be in the holes in the paddocks. The best bait for them was a bit of redfin.

Dad caught a big Murray cod in there, at the Sydney Hotel; he was as poor as a crow. He opened his mouth, and he had a turkey bone stuck in his throat. He'd been feeding on all the scraps from the hotel. Dad tethered him up there for three months; he kept feeding on the scraps, and fattened him up. We used to always tether our cod, the Murray cod they were up to 30 to 35 pounds. Dad once got bit by a tiger snake and he set it up on a line for a cod. He spent the night in hospital. When we checked the line it had been bitten in half! There used to be a lot of snakes around then. Then they started getting ticks, that seemed to have killed them off. A neighbour got one the other day with a tick on it.

We moved up to Cheshunt when I was 16, so I can't tell you about the Ovens after that. In the King I was told that in the early days there were cod right up the river, they were in the 'Bog hole', about 4 miles down from the 'Top Crossing', that was in the gold rush times, that was about 12 miles above William Hovell. It's up further than the 'Gun hole'. It got its name from the carts getting bogged near there; on the bridle track. They never quite finished the track because the railway opened. When we came to Cheshunt there was only trout. Dad and I were always putting lines in, at night, with bardy grubs on them and we never caught a cod, only trout. If they were there we would have caught them, we were always fishing. Other people did catch cod, just below the bridge, but they were few and far between. And the bream, some people were catching a few at that time at Whitfield, only a handful, but we never caught one at Cheshunt.

OH 109

Len Maples of Cheshunt was interviewed in July 2007 at an age of 65 years.

I'm 65; I grew up in Griffith, moved to this part of the woods in 1960. I fish the King; I know every hole from Lake William Hovell to Moyhu. I've caught cod in between the Gentle Annie Bridge and the Cheshunt Bridge in recent times. They've been 50/50 Murray cod and Trout cod. We used to fish the 'bidgee, back in the 50s; the majority of the catch back in those days was Silver perch and redfin. I remember my dad caught a 4 pound cod and he thought it was a red letter day! We used to get the odd yellowbelly too. I was friends with a local bloke, Jim Skins, who just passed away recently. Jim was in his 80s, he grew up in Whitfield. He said as a kid he would sometimes catch the Silver perch in the King at Whitfield. That was the grunter he was talking about, not the Macquarie perch. The trout fishing used to be good; there was monstrous trout in the King 40 years ago. My father in law lived on the Kiewa River; he talked about the 39 fires. They had a monstrous storm up there, the river turned black, it killed everything.

In the King now the majority of the Trout cod are small; I have caught one that would have been legal size for cod. Last year I caught 32 cod here, I use lures, rarely use bait these days. The majority of the Trout cod were twelve inches long. The biggest Murray cod was 14 pound, another four were legal and around 8 pound. Of the 32 cod I caught last year 10 were Trout cod. On the opening day, the first of December I caught 5 cod in 7 casts from my favourite hole, one was a Trout cod. I was fishing just downstream from Gentle Annie. The Trout cod are so aggressive. A couple of years ago I was fishing in this hole, there was a log in front of me, I flogged this hole with a lure. I threw this lure out about a foot inside the log, and this Trout cod came out and followed it to the bank. I stopped it, it was 2 or 3 inches from it, one turn of the reel and it had it. It was sheer aggression.