



Peel river health survey records native diversity

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A recent study into the health of Peel's waterways as part of the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation's Healthy Rivers program has revealed a good diversity and abundance of native fish and crayfish.

Department scientist Dom Heald said the survey showed native species were still prevalent throughout the region.

"Of particular interest were the large numbers of cobbler (*Tandanus bostocki*) in the Murray River, upstream of Pinjarra," Mr Heald said.

"This apparently healthy population in the middle reaches of the Murray is encouraging as other studies in the south west have suggested cobbler populations are in decline due to factors such as salinisation.

"Protecting areas such as the Murray is therefore important for the species' survival.

"Also evidence of koonac (*Cherax preissi*) in Buchanan's drain conservation category wetland was great to see from a scientific point of view.

"This native crayfish is uniquely adapted to thrive in these ephemeral waterways by digging burrows to avoid drying of surface waters."

Carter's freshwater mussel (*Westralunio carteri*) was also found at half of the sites assessed.

"This is good to see as the species is at risk due to habitat loss and increasing salinity in some south-west systems. The conservation status of the mussel was recently listed as vulnerable due to the reduction in range," he said.

However exotic species were also found at many sites in the region, with goldfish (*Carassius auratus*) present at two thirds of assessed sites and yabbies (*Cherax destructor*) present at half of the sites.

"These exotic species directly compete with native animals for food and habitat and should not be released into the natural environment," he said.

Assessments record the ecological condition of freshwater systems including the type and abundance of fish, crayfish and macroinvertebrates, water quality and condition, and the health of the aquatic habitat and riparian vegetation.

This information is used to provide advice to protect and improve the health of freshwater systems, and inform the State Government's water and natural resource management decisions including setting water allocation limits. The study was carried out by scientists from the department with help from Peel-Harvey Catchment Council and will be used to support the Regional Estuaries Initiative in the Peel Harvey Catchment.

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