

MEDIA RELEASE

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Native fish returned to Winton Wetlands on World Wetlands Day

Expert groups concerned with water management, fish conservation and ecological renewal have come together on the occasion of World Wetlands Day - 2 February - to return a key species of native fish to Winton Wetlands.

Supplies of the Southern Purple Spotted Gudgeon, critically endangered in Victoria, were released back into the waters of Winton Wetlands today in a cooperative activity involving Winton Wetlands Committee of Management, North Central and Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authorities, and groups interested in native fish breeding.

The addition of spotted gudgeon follows similar release activity last month involving Southern Pygmy Perch, another native fish once common in and around Winton Wetlands but made locally extinct in recent decades.

The push to bring back native fish previously lost to Winton Wetlands and adjacent areas are part of a three-state effort being funded through the Murray Darling Basin Authority.

This week's release of approximately 300 Spotted Gudgeon, and around 1,000 more Pygmy Perch (following an initial 750 last month), are in line with the theme of this year's World Wetlands Day: 'It's Time for Wetland Restoration'. Organisations around the world are marking the annual event in a range of different ways.

"Here in Australia we thought one of the best ways Winton Wetlands could mark World Wetlands Day is to get on with the release of these important native fish," Restoration Scientist Lance Lloyd said. "Research and preparation have been under way for several years now, working toward the day when this week's release would be possible."

Mr Lloyd said the activity had involved cooperation not just between Winton Wetlands and two catchment management authorities, but also with groups including Native Fish Australia, Australia New Guinea Fishes Association, fish breeder Middle Creek Farm, and Aquasave-NGT, part of Nature Glenelg Trust, an environmental group based in South Australia. Captive breeding activity has been supported by the Victorian Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA).

"We're seeing an unprecedented level of cooperation and partnership happening across three States, the Federal Government and expert groups of various kinds, all linked by a common interest in achieving a return to healthier waterways and more diverse and balanced ecosystems.

“It’s something we can all begin to take some pride in. In effect, we’re working to turn back extinctions. We’ll all be watching closely and continuing to work together to monitor the progress from here.”

This week’s release of Spotted Gudgeon brings the total of nationally threatened species at Winton Wetlands to more than 15, with even more at a state level. Winton Wetlands’ broader restoration program has three main elements:

- Restoring the habitat of native species
- Eliminating threats to native plants and animals
- ‘Rewilding’ species lost from the site that cannot easily re-colonise

“This re-introduction activity returns vital ecosystem functions back into the system,” Mr Lloyd said.

“The native fish prey on smaller creatures in the water and in turn are prey for endangered bird and fish species. Healthy wetland habitats, including submerged aquatic plants, can protect enough of them to allow the broader wildlife population to thrive.”

One of the keys to success for Winton Wetlands - the biggest wetland restoration project in the southern hemisphere - is to work together with partners in ways that allow its Committee of Management and others to achieve far more than any of them could on their own.

A particularly important symbolic dimension of this week’s fish release was that it included a welcome to country by Winton Wetlands’ Koorie cultural officer Nikki James, recognising the traditional custodianship of Yorta Yorta people.

Further information and artwork materials for World Wetlands Day are available at: www.worldwetlandsday.org

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