

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12.01 AM 19 JULY 2024

Second Release Set to Boost the Future of the Murray Crayfish in South Australia

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An additional 80 Murray crayfish have been released into the River Murray as part of an ongoing project to re-establish this iconic species in South Australia.

The crayfish were released into the river at a secret location to protect the community in its infancy.

Murray crayfish were once common in the river but overfishing, the effects of river regulation and poor water quality contributed to the decline of the species to virtual extinction. Improvements to these conditions have meant that Murray crayfish are now likely to thrive in the river, leading ecologists to revisit the opportunity.

An initial release in 2023 saw 200 crays released into the South Australian portion of the River Murray with very encouraging results. In an Australian first, 30 crays were fitted with radio tracking devices, allowing researchers to monitor their movement post release. All 30 tracked crays are alive and moving, providing valuable insight into the behaviour of Murray crayfish.

Senior Aquatic Ecologist Dr Sylvia Zukowski from Nature Glenelg Trust said that the ongoing reintroductions of Murray Crayfish back to their former habitat will be a welcome and very important boost to efforts to re-establish crays in South Australia.

"This five-year project provides a valuable chance of helping Murray crayfish return to South Australian waters," said the Murray cray expert.

"It's also provided us with more data and a better understanding of the specific conditions that Murray cray like so we can fine tune our approach for subsequent releases" she added.

Dr Zukowski said that re-establishing Murray crayfish was an important step for the environment and the conservation of an iconic species at a Murray Darling Basin level. The Murray crayfish is also of cultural significance for local First Nation's people and the River Murray and Mallee Aboriginal Corporation (RMMAC) is a key partner in the project.

Sam Hardy, the Acting Team Leader Wetlands at the Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board, said that the initiative relied upon a strong network of partnerships.

“This project is a collaborative effort between the landscape board and Nature Glenelg Trust with the River Murray and Mallee Aboriginal Corporation (RMMAC) also playing a significant role in monitoring and community engagement”.

“Acquiring and releasing the crays in 2024 has involved the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries and PIRSA, so the success of these efforts really hinges on the relationships between these organisations,” he added.

This project is supported by the Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board with funding from the South Australian Government’s Landscape Priorities Fund.