

First Release of Critically Endangered fish into the South East - And they are 'Doing Well'

Last October two Hundred Yarra Pygmy Perch (*Nannoperca obscura*) were successfully released into Piccaninnie Ponds Conservation Park, south of Mount Gambier, by Natural Resources South East, Millicent High School and the Nature Glenelg Trust.

The "Yarra" is a small native freshwater fish that is rated as Critically Endangered in South Australia. Populations of the Yarra have declined in the South East over many years due to habitat loss as many permanent water bodies have either been drained or have dried through drought periods.

Surveys over the last 15 years have seen a dramatic drop in Yarra numbers to an extent where fish have been rescued from drying water holes and placed into captive breeding areas at Millicent High School and Kingston Community School aquaculture facilities. These schools along with Peter Hyde of Mount Muirhead have been doing fantastic work to breed fish to a degree where they can now be

released back into the wild.

During January this year, a survey was undertaken at Piccaninnie Ponds to determine how successful the reintroduction has been. The results exceeded expectations. Of the 200 fish released, 23 were recaptured, with 3 of the fish having moved 100m from the release site. Given the location and interactions with other fish species in the Ponds, a recapture of 5 Yarras would have been a great result.

The captive breeding, site identification and reintroduction program has been a collaboration between the South Australian and Australian governments, the South Eastern Drainage Board, Millicent and Kingston Schools

and volunteers from the Friends of Mount Gambier Area Parks.

Despite the success of the fish release there is still a lot of work to do before the community can be confident that Yarra Pygmy Perch populations are once again stable in the South East.

Below: Yarra Pygmy Perch. Photo M. Hammer

