

## **This Question of Translocation.**

We think it is fair to say that the Recreational Fishing Enhancement Program (RFEP) has been an outstanding success. We doubt that too many would disagree with that opinion. For those who are not aware, the RFEP is the structure administered by Queensland Fisheries Service to oversee the stocking of fingerlings into impoundments and rivers throughout the State. It is also fair to say that translocation has been a significant factor in this success. Without it, the opportunities available to recreational freshwater fisherman today would be close to non-existent. The program commenced in 1986, and so has stood the test of time, or has it?

The first official translocation, under the RFEP at least, was undertaken some 17 years ago. It is understood that Fisheries moved fish around long before this, but would now most likely, deny such activity. Even with the control of the RFEP, in the early days, fish stocking and translocation, was very much carried out on an ad hoc basis. It was not until, maybe 10 years ago, that a sub-committee of the Freshwater Management Advisory Committee was formed to administer all stockings and translocations in Queensland. A set of protocols were drafted to assist in the decision making process. FFSAQ was, and still is, a participatory member of that sub-committee, and in principle, agrees with the protocol.

It was around this time, that some aspects of the stocking program began to be questioned. May we suggest that it was just as well that the concept of fish stocking for recreational fishing purposes was by then well entrenched, and had become enormously successful. We shudder to think to what history would record, if one was contemplating such a move today.

Now this is not to say, that fish stocking and translocation, should be undertaken with a Rambo approach, and with total disregard to our environment. It must be carried out in a responsible manner that provides community benefit, i.e. fishing opportunities, with as little impact as possible on our ecosystems.

Having accepted that responsibility, it must also be realized however, that most of the stocking and translocations take place in impoundments, where dams and rivers have dramatically changed forever, the natural environment. May it be suggested that stocking, compared to the infrastructure of huge dams, is a small player indeed, if any at all. This is particularly so, when most translocated species cannot breed in impoundments or regulated river systems. Another safety factor. A further comparison in the equation is that of exotic pest fishes. These exotics are more likely, and have already done so, to devastate our waterways than any native species that maybe translocated.

It is recognized however, that stocking rivers need different criteria to that of stocking impoundments. Rivers that are only regulated (have dams and weirs constructed) in a minor way, and still have much of their length relatively natural, deserve differing protocols. The retainment of biodiversity must be balanced with community benefit. Rivers that are not regulated in any way, and are in pristine condition (there are still a few left in Queensland), should be classified as "wild" and left in peace.

As alluded to previously, today, the stocking program is being questioned more frequently, and with much more vigour. Make no mistake about that. Some of what is being purported is acceptable and just responsible. But others have a view to curtailing stocking entirely on the premise that it is damaging to the environment.

In recent years, the effects of stocking and translocation have been a gendered at a number of freshwater forums. The three most reported being: The Draft Native Fish Strategy for the Murray-Darling Basin 2002-2012, Managing Fish Translocation & Stocking in the Murray-Darling Basin, and Fish Stocking and the Distribution and Potential impact of Translocated Fishes in Streams of the it Tropics Region of North Queensland. All of these papers indicate concern over the practice of fish stocking, and advocate the use of the "precautionary principle" approach. Taken as an extreme definition, as is being espoused by some, would mean that no stocking at all would be allowed. This is a ludicrous interpretation and not realistic. Precaution is an important factor, but must be considered sensibly. Otherwise, we would not continue to exist on this planet.

We are optimistic in the belief that fish stocking and translocation, will continue in Queensland, notwithstanding the questioning it is currently receiving. There may be some changes to the practice that we now carry out, but in the main, we are sure that these will not significantly impact on the program that creates fantastic recreational freshwater fisheries. The social benefit to all anglers, as well as the economic boost to local and rural communities, cannot be underestimated and discarded. Queensland Tourism has recently recognized fish stocking in impoundments as a sustainable enterprise, and is now promoting this fishery in its tourist promotion.

However, we must be ever vigilant and be aware of the moves that some purists are proposing.

Whenever you are confronted with this issue, and We am sure that at some stage you will be, be responsible in your approach, but be sure that you emphasize the significant benefit that the practice of fish stocking brings to our community.

Remember, fishing as you enjoy today, may depend on it.