A year in retrospect
Les Kowitz  |  November 2009 » Regular Features / FFSAQ /

The following summary of freshwater fishery issues as seen by FFSAQ was presented to the Annual General Meeting of Sunfish Queensland on 13 November 2009.

It has to be said the past year could be described as a mixed bag. There have been a few positives, but equally there have been some negatives. With the ever declining budgets the Queensland government continues to adopt, the funding of even normal routine operations such as monitoring existing fish stocks, has more or less ceased. Of course, this means that any special projects have no chance of being allocated appropriate funding.

As we all know, the abolition of the Management Advisory Committee (MAC) process is going to have a huge impact. Community engagement will now be at a very low level in any form of consultation. But not to dwell on the negatives, the Queensland Lifestyle programs are continuing, and the Freshwater Fisheries Workshops are again being conducted.

Membership of FFSAQ continues to be reasonably stable with around 50 freshwater fishing and stocking clubs being affiliated. This is seen as a positive indicator that there is a community desire to enhance the freshwater fishery in Queensland.

Some of these groups are very active by becoming involved in running their own fish hatcheries, engaged in local habitat rehabilitation, and undertaking angler education courses. Others are limited in their activities being dictated by location and population. But all have a common objective: to improve fishing opportunities.

The demise of the Freshwater MAC is seen as a very backward move. This forum proved to be a valuable avenue to raise community issues and enable debates and negotiate outcomes for the betterment of the fishery. This opportunity now no longer exists to engage with the community at a grassroots level. There is no way the proposed super MAC can ever cater for any where near the level of community liaison that is required and appropriate.

In March this year, a Freshwater Fisheries Workshop was held at Boondooma Dam, after an absence of nearly two years. One can only presume this lapse was again due to a lack of funding, or could it be because of bureaucratic disinterest? The Boondooma workshop was a statewide meeting and was the first time that all stocking groups had the opportunity to attend such an event.

Previously, there were two workshops, one in the north and one in the south, or more recently on a regional six workshop basis. Although attendance was not as high as expected, the forum was very successful, with an overall acceptance of agenda and format. Hopefully some type of these events can be continued on an annual basis.

The Stocked Impoundment Permit (SIP) scheme continues to be a valuable source of funds that allows the continuing purchase and release of fingerlings that sustain impoundment fisheries. General acceptance of this concept increases each year with now over 50,000 permits being issued. A total of $618,000 was distributed to stocking groups across Queensland this year.

The suspected chemical contamination of the Noosa River and its surrounds, particularly the fish hatchery at Boreen Point, is a real concern. None of the allegations have yet been substantiated, but the possibility of agricultural spray drift must be taken seriously.

There are a number of community sectors that are of the opinion that appropriate progress by government authorities is not adequate. This matter has the potential to impede the fish stocking program as this hatchery is a major supplier of fingerlings to stocking groups. If this chemical residue is causing problems, the impact on the local environment is totally unacceptable.

This financial year is the third and final round of the Living the Queensland Lifestyle program. Funding allocation includes $100,000 for fish stocking, $140,000 for Jungle Perch research, and some $200,000 for the Socio Economic study. This 2006 election commitment has been very welcomed by the freshwater fraternity.

SEQWater has recently released a draft Recreation Management Framework. The document outlines an overarching position from which all existing and future recreation activities will be considered. Since the formation of the State Governments water grid for southeast Queensland, SEQWater now has 24 storages under its control.

The framework document is so broad and general, that it could easily be described as benign, but as the saying goes, the devil is in the detail down the track. Given SEQWater’s past record and attitude towards recreational fishing at these storages, there is every need to be most concerned.

The draft Wyaralong Dam Recreational Master Plan being developed by Queensland Water Infrastructure attests to this opinion. Wyaralong Dam will be under control of SEQWater.

The Murray Cod Research Project on the Dumaresq River has been one of the highlights of the past year. The project is a collaborative one as it runs along the border between NSW and Queensland. Both Queensland and NSW Fisheries as well as the Queensland Murray Darling Committee are involved, but also and most importantly, are the 60 or so freshwater anglers involved from both states. The project would not
FFSAQ continues to have a presence at both the Brisbane Boat Show and the Tinnie & Tackle Show. These venues provide an excellent opportunity to raise the profile of FFSAQ and to promote the activity of freshwater recreational fishing. Many thanks to Marine Queensland for the sponsorship of floor space.

FFSAQ sees itself as an important component of recreational fishing in Queensland, and as it continues to receive the support of its affiliate members and the general public, there is no reason that this role should not expand and prosper.

NEW FFSAQ WEBSITE

FFSAQ is currently in the process of developing a new website. It is acknowledged that the existing site needs a new image, its content is dated, and these inadequacies are potentially impacting adversely on the future enhancement of the freshwater fishery. The site upgrade is expected to be complete by the end of the year so keep an eye out for it. Keep an eye on www.ffsaq.com.au for the forthcoming new website.