



## Improving Fish Habitat in the Onkaparinga

**In fishing there are no guarantees** - except one. You can't catch a fish if there's no fish to catch! This is a simple reality that modern fishos are becoming increasingly concerned about, and is more evident now in the way they talk about their fishing experiences and the way they actually fish.

Despite catch and release, ditching lip grippers, wetting the 'brag mat', using lures to avoid deep hooking and an overall push to follow a voluntary code of practice (which includes all of these things and more)... it is healthy habitat that makes more fish and gives anglers their sport.

Australia's first dedicated fish habitat conservation movement, OzFish Unlimited, is fighting the decline of fish habitat, which the not-for-profit organisation believes is

one of the biggest threats to the security of recreational fishing in Australia.

OzFish Unlimited's CEO Craig Copeland said the passion that anglers have towards their sport is being harnessed by OzFish and directed into local grassroots habitat projects to benefit fish. "Aussie anglers want better fishing and healthy environments for fish and we also want to protect our sport's future, but fishers need to know what they can do to make it happen. OzFish is building on that momentum right across the country by helping anglers find ways to protect and restore the health of their local fishery."

Mr Copeland said a perfect example of local anglers working together to improve fish habitat and fishing opportunities was in SA's Onkaparinga River, which like so many Australian rivers, has suffered from degradation and neglect after a long history of vegetation clearing and urbanisation.

OzFish volunteers are actively helping to improve the river's health by installing snags, building new substrate and habitat with the deployment of 180 limestone concrete blocks, and plans are underway to plant trees along the riverbank.

Chapter President James Fitzpatrick said it is the ongoing dedication and hard work of the local OzFish members which has been key in raising awareness of how degraded the system is. "We've got a groundswell of support from anglers but also the community to help the Onkaparinga River recover; we all want sustainable fish numbers and that means we need quality environments for them to live in. It's that simple."

Early sounding results and observations have shown fish are already congregating around the limestone blocks which will soon be colonised with mussels, barnacles, coralline tubeworms and oysters. It is



expected that the limestone surface will imitate the natural surface of a shellfish reef, allowing the invertebrates to take hold.

Mr Fitzpatrick said the plan to improve the health of the Onkaparinga estuary has been a collaborative effort between fishers, the community, business, multiple state and local government departments such as RecFish SA and the Recreation Fishing Grants Program.

"The next stage will be to install snags along the shoreline to help reduce erosion, provide shelter for fish and give other small life forms a surface to get a foot hold and grow, and replant more of the river banks."

To find out more OzFish Unlimited can be contacted at [www.ozfish.org.au](http://www.ozfish.org.au) or on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/OzFishUnlimited](http://www.facebook.com/OzFishUnlimited). **FSA**

