



THE PEEL RIVER & THE ECA

*Environmental Contingency Allowance (ECA)

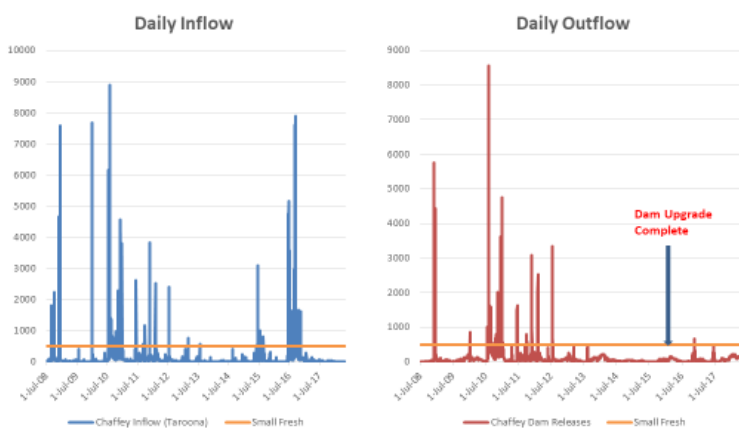
MAY 2018

THE FISH OF THE PEEL RIVER

'At an early hour this morning, one of our men caught a fish, which weighed eighteen pounds (over 70cm); but according to the natives, this was no uncommon size' (Mitchell 1839). Mitchell also described and sketched other native fish, including catfish and silver perch.

The fish community is in a moderate condition providing a strong platform for recovery if we get the management actions right. There are 14 native fish species recorded in the Peel but unfortunately, the majority of these are in low numbers and some key species like Silver Perch have disappeared from records.

Chaffey Dam - 10 Year Daily Inflow and Outflow Comparison



ABOVE: Chart shows lack of outflow in comparison to inflow after the upgrade of the dam.

WHAT IS THE ECA?

The Environmental Contingency Allowance is an allocation of water for the environment in Chaffey Dam intended to try and help the river deal with the ecological consequences of increasing the capacity of the Dam. The ECA for the Peel River is 5,000 megalitres of General Security water. It can't be carried over to the next year. Under defined circumstance, some of this flow is permitted to be extracted when flow is greater than 50 megalitres a day at Piallamore. The Peel ECA is in addition to environmental water owned by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder. The Peel ECA provides an opportunity to restore some of the flows and variability lost with the dam upgrade. Management of the ECA is not trying to return the river to 'natural'. Fresh events are critical for native fish species in the Peel River, as well as for instream food production, and connecting and refreshing the system.

WHY IS THE ECA NEEDED IN DRY CONDITIONS

Dry conditions have prevailed over the Peel valley for most of the season, with flows at Carroll Gap not reaching the minimum depth that allows fish to move freely at that point of the Peel, as well as into the Namoi River. This impact has been compounded for the environment as natural rainfall and flow events over the last few years have been captured in the Dam.

To protect environmental values of the Peel River during these dry times a proposal to deliver 1,257 megalitres of Commonwealth Environmental Water with 2,613 megalitres of ECA has been developed for delivery within the next few weeks. The purpose of this flow is to wet some low-level bars and backwaters to improve instream productivity making food for fish, and provide movement opportunities and increased access to habitat for native fish, all of which is critical to protect native fish through winter and into the spring spawning season.

The planned release volume of the ECA has been reduced, taking into consideration current conditions and stakeholder feedback, largely driven by concerns raised by irrigators, who have already had the opportunity to call on and use their entitlement this season. The reduced volume of ECA release will compromise ecological outcomes in the Peel River, affecting native fish and river health.



THE FUTURE

The need for the ECA is because of regulation. Future delivery of the ECA should not be limited by irrigators nor should that water be constrained or allowed to be extracted as it moves down the Peel River. In that way the demands of a working river have been met by the Dam upgrade and the ECA can help sustain the environment to ensure a healthy river system for the benefit of all.

It is important that the views of all stakeholder groups are equally represented in the management of water for the environment. To help this it is hoped that in the future the Peel ECA will be governed by a Water Advisory Group.

To express your interest about being involved as a recreational fisher in such a group please contact Anne Michie at carponkeepit@gmail.com.