Department of **Employment, Economic Development and Innovation**
Fisheries Queensland

Pest fish alert: tilapia threat

The iconic Murray–Darling Basin is at risk of becoming infested with tilapia—the 'cane toads of our waterways'.

Tilapia, also known as Mozambique mouth-brooders, are listed in the world's 100 worst invasive species. They are regarded as one of the greatest threats to Australia's aquatic ecosystem.

Three characteristics of tilapia have made them successful as an invasive species:

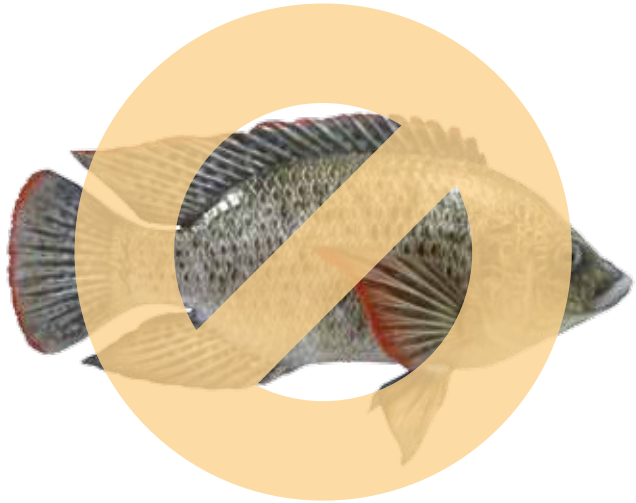
- **Highly efficient reproduction.** Tilapia are prolific breeders and can reproduce year-round.
- **Adaptable food requirements.** Tilapia are omnivores and feed on a wide variety of plant and animal matter.
- **Flexible habitat preferences.** Tilapia can adapt to a variety of aquatic habitats, including habitats that have high salinity. They can breed in both fresh water and brackish water.

This noxious fish species is spreading at an alarming rate. Tilapia are now distributed throughout many locations in Queensland and are threatening to invade the upper reaches of the Murray–Darling Basin.

If tilapia become established in a flowing river or creek in the Murray–Darling Basin, it will be almost impossible to eradicate them.

Why do we need to protect the Murray–Darling Basin?

Covering more than a million square kilometres of land, the Murray–Darling Basin is Australia's largest river system and one of the biggest river systems in the world. The basin includes 23 major rivers and passes through five states and territories—Queensland, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and South Australia.



The Murray–Darling Basin is one of the most important freshwater ecosystems in Australia. It is home to 35 species of native fish, including some of Australia's most significant species. The basin is the habitat of the Murray cod, Australia's largest freshwater fish.

How would tilapia impact the basin?

Tilapia can outcompete native fish for habitat and food, and their feeding and nesting habits can degrade water quality. A breeding tilapia population established in the Murray–Darling Basin would see the pest fish quickly dominate the water body. The result would be a loss of native fish numbers.

MURRAY–DARLING BASIN AUTHORITY
NSW GOVERNMENT
Queensland Government

Male

Female

Juvenile

How can you help?

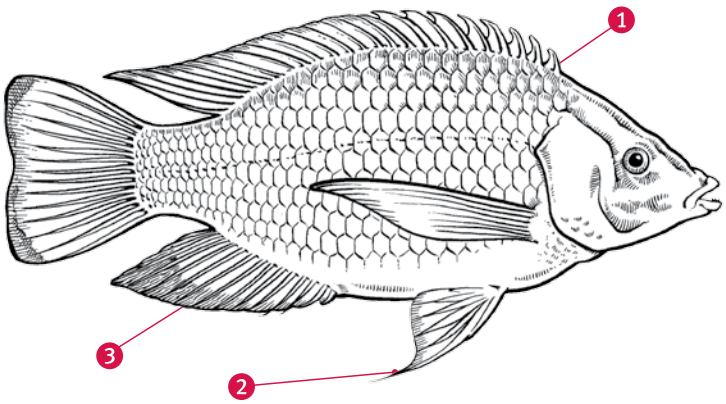
1. Know how to identify tilapia

Tilapia vary in colour from dark olive to silver-grey, depending on their age and their environment.

They are generally deep-bodied fish with thin profiles, long snouts and pronounced lips/jaws.

Their dorsal (upper) fin (1) is continuous and ends in an extended point. (Most native species have a dorsal fin with a dent/gap in the middle and a rounded end.)

Their pelvic (belly) fins (2) are long and almost touch the front of the anal (bottom) fin (3). (This is unlike most native species, which have short pelvic fins.)



2. Don't spread tilapia

Tilapia infestations are usually caused by people moving the fish between waterways. Do not do anything that could spread tilapia between waterways:

- Don't use tilapia as bait (dead or alive). Tilapia are mouth-brooders and even dead adults may be carrying viable eggs/larvae in their mouths.
- Don't empty aquariums into local waterways.
- Don't stock dams or ponds with tilapia. Use local native fish instead.
- Don't return a catch of tilapia to the water. If you catch any tilapia, kill them humanely and either bury them or put them in a bin.

3. Report tilapia sightings

The government tracks pest fish infestations. If you catch or sight any tilapia, or if you suspect someone of stocking or moving tilapia, **report it**. You will need to provide information such as the date, location, description of the fish, a photograph (if possible) and a description of the waterway.

To report tilapia sightings or catches, or for more information:

- in **Queensland**, call 13 25 23 or visit www.fisheries.qld.gov.au
- in **New South Wales**, call (02) 4916 3877 or visit www.dpi.nsw.gov.au

CS0497 06/11