

# NAMOI AQUATIC HABITAT INITIATIVE

## RETURNING FISH TO THE NAMOI



## NAMOI DEMONSTRATION REACH COMMUNICATION PLAN



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Cover photos: Various sites of rehabilitation and engagement activities carried out within the Namoi Demonstration Reach 2007-2009.

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## **1. Introduction**

The following document outlines the communication plan associated with the Namoi demonstration reach project. The project is being carried out by Industry and Investment (I&I) NSW (Fisheries Conservation and Aquaculture) in association with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) and the Namoi Catchment Management Authority (CMA). Information in this plan should be read in conjunction with the NSW Demonstration Reach Whole of Life Plan.

### ***1.1 About this plan***

The riparian and aquatic habitat of inland NSW has suffered a serious decline in quality and quantity since European settlement. This trend is evident in waterways throughout the Murray-Darling Basin, with impacts associated with urban, industrial and agricultural development placing significant pressure on the natural environment. This pressure has also impacted on native fish populations throughout the waterways of the Basin, with factors such as barriers to fish passage, flow regulation, thermal pollution, habitat degradation, introduction of alien species, and poor land management practices all affecting native fish populations.

The Native Fish Strategy (NFS) was developed in response to widespread agreement in 2003 that native fish populations were at approximately 10 per cent compared to pre-European settlement (MDBC, 2004). The Strategy is a 50-year program that aims to rehabilitate native fish communities back to 60 per cent of pre-European levels by addressing key threats to native fish populations in the Basin. One of the main methods of achieving this is the establishment of demonstration reaches across the Basin. The purpose of demonstration reaches is to show, by example, how river and floodplain rehabilitation can be achieved by integrated actions such as riparian zone rehabilitation, alien species management, re-snagging, improvements to water quality, improved fish passage and enhanced aquatic vegetation, whilst educating and involving the local community.

The Namoi Demonstration Reach was established in 2007 and covers an area of approximately 120km along the Namoi River and its tributaries between Boggabri and Narrabri. A significant array of aquatic habitat rehabilitation works has already been implemented along the reach, including the reintroduction of 185 snags at 4 priority sites; the planting of over 10,800 native aquatic and riparian plants; over 20 km of woody weed control and removal, managing stock access to waterways through nearly 12 km of riparian fencing and the installation of 13 off-stream watering points; fixing fish passage at 3 priority sites, and; controlling erosion at 8 priority sites.

The successful rehabilitation of a reach or floodplain is designed to enhance community awareness, support and involvement in management; providing models that can be used elsewhere in the Basin. The Namoi demonstration reach has already achieved significant community awareness of the river, amongst a range of stakeholders including, landholders, anglers and community groups. This interest has helped forge strong partnerships with a diverse range of stakeholders in the region including Boggabri Coal, Narrabri Shire Council, Narrabri Amateur Fishing Club, Red Chief Aboriginal Land Council, Namoi Aboriginal Advisory Committee and the Boggabri Landcare-Rivercare group.

The purpose of this plan is to identify stakeholders involved in the demonstration reach project and effective methods to communicate and engage with these groups. The plan will build on existing communication activities, using clear objectives and key messages to ensure that stakeholder groups continue to be engaged and involved in the project. The Namoi demonstration reach Communication Plan will be a living document, and it is anticipated that elements of the plan will be modified to reflect changes in knowledge that result from the implementation of on-ground works and stakeholder engagement.

## ***1.2 Aims and objectives of the Communication Plan***

### **Communication goal**

To demonstrate and engage stakeholders in the cumulative benefits of aquatic habitat rehabilitation, encouraging participation by community groups in the management of aquatic habitats and the recovery of native fish.

### **Communication objectives**

1. **Raise community awareness** of project objectives, on-ground works and outcomes through regional field days, workshops, information sessions or other community forums, media releases and events, publications and the distribution of advisory material.
2. **Encourage involvement of stakeholders**, and achieve a combination of financial and in-kind contributions to undertake on-ground works from volunteer working groups, riparian landholders, fishing clubs and other community groups.
3. **Educate stakeholders**, including recreational anglers, indigenous community groups, local residents and landholders, and schools on the importance of habitat through meetings, workshops, community forums, advisory material, and interpretive signage.
4. **Obtain feedback** from stakeholders about on-ground works and rehabilitation activities, and the outcomes of the project.

### **Key messages**

It is important to ensure that stakeholders are engaged in a clear and consistent manner throughout the demonstration reach to help establish and maintain the project. To help achieve this, and the project objectives, the following key messages have been developed:

1. Native fish communities in the Namoi are at risk, but there are things that can be done to help bring them back.
2. Carrying out a range of activities simultaneously increases the benefit to native fish, aquatic habitat, and river health.
3. Fish habitats can be improved, leading to healthier fish populations.
4. If we know what the problems are, we can plan how to fix them.
5. Restoring fish communities won't happen overnight: it's a long-term commitment.
6. Native fish need the help of everyone, especially local communities that live and work around our waterways.
7. Projects will also benefit landholders through improved on-farm management, leading to increased primary production and land value.

### **1.3 Project partners**

To ensure the successful establishment, implementation and longevity of the Namoi demonstration reach, it is essential that relevant stakeholders are identified and engaged from the commencement of the project. Potential partners for the Namoi demonstration reach include:

#### **Industry and Investment (I&I) NSW**

I&I NSW Conservation Action Unit are managing the Namoi demonstration reach project. The Unit is also managing similar projects along the Darling and Murrumbidgee Rivers, as well as multiple aquatic rehabilitation related projects across the state. I&I NSW regional conservation staff in the Aquatic Habitat Protection unit, fisheries officers, freshwater recreational fisheries staff and media liaison officers all make in-kind contributions to the project.

#### **Namoi CMA**

The Namoi demonstration reach initially commenced with funding from the Namoi CMA, as part of the catchment-wide Namoi Aquatic Habitat Initiative. The project will help the CMA meet several Riverine Ecosystems Management Targets, including those that focus on providing habitat protection and rehabilitation, and managing threatening processes for aquatic threatened species. Through the CMA there is also an opportunity to access NSW Waterwatch contributions.

#### **Murray-Darling Basin Authority (Native Fish Strategy)**

The NFS has been designed to bring communities and governments together to enhance native fish populations throughout the basin over the next 50 years. The Namoi demonstration reach will adopt many of the objectives and driving actions of the NFS. The NFS will provide important environmental linkages with the new Basin Plan, and also has linkages with other existing Basin initiatives, including the Sustainable Rivers Audit and the Living Murray initiative.

#### **Aquatic funding programs**

Several aquatic funding programs exist that can potentially contribute to the development of the Namoi demonstration reach. These include state based programs such as the Environmental Trust, Recreational Freshwater Fishing Trust, and State Water fish passage remediation, as well as Federal funding programs such as Caring for our Country.

#### **Industry**

There are several major industries surrounding the Namoi demonstration reach that have the potential to impact on the project, and may be pivotal in garnering the support of other stakeholder groups. These include irrigation bodies, such as Namoi Water, and mining companies such as Boggabri Coal. In addition to this, there are also research institutions, including the University of New England and Cotton Catchment Communities CRC, which can assist in monitoring and evaluation requirements.

#### **Community groups**

There is an opportunity to gather in-kind contributions and support for the demonstration reach project from the local community, including fishing club members, riparian landholders, Indigenous community groups, Landcare groups, and education establishments (eg. TAFE, high schools, etc.). Other groups, including Conservation Volunteers and Fishcare volunteers, may also provide in-kind contributions to assist with on-ground works.

## 2. Target audiences and stakeholders

The target audiences and stakeholders for the Namoi demonstration reach project include landholders, river users, community groups, volunteers, government agencies and non-government and industry organisations. In addition, there is an incidental audience in the form of tourists. These target audiences are listed in Table 1 and their potential communication issues are identified.

**Table 1:** Target audiences and stakeholders, and their communication issues.

<b>Audience</b>	<b>Potential issue / project risk</b>
Riparian landholders	Concerns about changes in traditional land and resource management, and the additional cost/labour associated with that change. Skeptical about environmental benefits of proposed works. Other on-farm priorities compete with involvement in project.
Irrigation industry	Potentially negative affect on aquatic habitat, and need to focus on positive partnerships that look at infrastructure and management changes to address entrainment, water quality, and flow regimes.
Mining industry	Potentially negative affect on aquatic habitat and community perception, and need to focus on positive partnerships that assist projects.
Research institutions (UNE, Cotton CRC)	Ability to tie in project activities with research priorities.
Schools/Education institutions	Ability to tie in project messages with curriculum needs.
Indigenous community (Narrabri LALC and Red Chief LALC)	Need to be clear about opportunities for the community as they may get excited about potential involvement through employment, but there is concern about potential impact on sites of cultural importance.
Narrabri Shire council	May want to know economic, social and environmental impacts of on-ground works implemented on public land.
Recreational anglers	Generally supportive of rehabilitation activities and prepared to provide some financial and in-kind contributions. Will require consultation to improve their awareness of the impacts of recreational fishing and the benefits of rehabilitation works on fish populations.
Murray Darling Basin Authority	Ensure that the project complements NFS demonstration reach objectives, and that the project milestones are being met accordingly.
Namoi Catchment Management Authority	Ensure that the project complements CAP objectives, and that the project milestones are being met accordingly.
State agencies (State Water, DECCW, LHPA)	Need to be aware of any associated permit/land access requirements associated with works, and need to ensure support and involvement where possible, in on-ground activities.
NGOs – Conservation Volunteers Australia, etc	Supportive of rehabilitation activities and willing participants in riparian rehabilitation works. Opportunities will most likely be limited, but when they arise, volunteer organisations will be invited to take part.
Local urban communities and businesses – Narrabri and Boggabri	Support from and education of local communities for such projects is imperative for success. Local media releases, advisory materials and participation in field days and other social events are effective means of promoting benefits of the works. Engaging the community through participation is also a valuable way to raise awareness.
General public – local and neighbouring towns (eg. Gunnedah, Wee Waa)	Lack of knowledge about aquatic habitat rehabilitation initiatives being undertaken in inland NSW. Poor perceptions about the quality of fishing and aquatic habitat in the Namoi River, and Murray-Darling Basin.
Tourists	Details about rehabilitation works is difficult to pass onto tourists. This can be overcome through works and signage at popular tourist locations, coupled with an alliance with local tourist centres.

### 3. Mediums and methods to reach target audience

There are a range of mediums and methods that may be implemented to ensure the successful engagement of stakeholder groups throughout the duration of the demonstration reach project. These community engagement activities can be divided into the five broad categories of awareness raising; education; field days; signage, and; media, based on the activity undertaken, with examples of each outlined in Table 2.

**Table 2: Stakeholder education and awareness categories and examples for the Namoi demonstration reach project.**

Stakeholder Engagement Category	Examples
Awareness raising	carp musters
	stakeholder meetings
	fact sheets
	case studies
	conferences
Education	school visits/workshops
	educational material
Field Days/Workshops	demonstration days
	open days
	forums
Signage	farm gate signs
	interpretive signage
Media	radio interviews
	TV interviews
	newspaper/magazine articles

An additional and perhaps very important method of communication will involve informal communication with stakeholders. Experience has suggested that landholders often tend to shy away from being directly and formally approached by Government agencies and that informal engagement can at times have greater effect, especially if conducted in an environment where the landholder is relaxed. This method of communication requires project officers to always be looking for opportunities to informally promote the benefits of the project and on-farm riparian works wherever and whenever the opportunities arise.

### 4. Key Communication Outcomes

#### 4.1 Achieving the communication objectives

Specific examples of communication methods that will meet the communication objectives of the Namoi demonstration reach project are outlined below, with existing activities detailed in Attachment 1. These will help guide the engagement of stakeholder groups throughout the project.

##### 1. Raise community awareness

- Host field days and workshops that demonstrate and promote rehabilitation techniques, including aquatic revegetation and propagating; resnagging; carp musters, and; water quality monitoring.
- Attend relevant field days and workshops conducted by government agencies or community groups to promote the demonstration reach project.

- Attend and present at regional, state and national forums/conferences/symposiums.
- Develop and distribute relevant media releases throughout the project through local, state and national media outlets including newspaper, radio, television and internet.
- Prepare, publish and distribute advisory material, including introductory brochures, case study documents and signage.

## **2. Encourage involvement of stakeholders**

- Provide seed funding to assist landholders and community groups to undertake rehabilitation activities.
- Organise volunteer working groups to undertake rehabilitation activities at project sites, including weed removal and riparian planting.
- Organise community events, such as carp musters, involving local fishing clubs, businesses and communities.
- Distribute information to encourage recreational anglers to report tagged fish caught as part of the freshwater fish tagging program and associated project monitoring and evaluation activities.

## **3. Educate stakeholders**

- Erect project-related advisory signage at high profile project sites, including public access points within or close to the townships of Narrabri and Boggabri.
- Prepare, publish and distribute advisory material, including introductory brochures, case study documents and rehabilitation specific activities.
- Develop and distribute relevant media releases throughout the project through local, state and national media outlets including newspaper, radio, television and internet.
- Undertake demonstration reach related workshops with schools in the local area.
- Assist in developing education modules related to the demonstration reach concept.

## **4. Obtain feedback**

- Hold community consultation forums to consult stakeholders on priority sites and rehabilitation activities throughout the project.

### ***4.2 Sharing communication outcomes***

An important aspect of the Namoi demonstration reach communication plan is ensuring that the outcomes of the project are shared with stakeholders on a local, regional and, where applicable, state or national level. The following methods will be used to ensure that information about the project is distributed to stakeholders:

- Media releases/media events.
- Community information forums.
- Published articles in circulars/newsletters.
- Presentation at regional, state and national forums/conferences/symposiums focusing on riverine health/instream rehabilitation.
- Targeted signage at strategic locations in the demonstration reach.
- Promotions through local tourism agencies/guides and businesses.
- Engagement of landholders and community groups, including fishing clubs and Indigenous communities.

## 5. Timing of priority communication actions

**Table 3: Priority actions for the Namoi demonstration reach, highlighting the location, timeframe and category each will address.**

Stakeholder Engagement Category	Priority Action	Location	Timeframe
Awareness	Carp musters	Existing reach, with potential to extend around catchment	Annually throughout project (March), with increased involvement and ownership from fishing clubs
	Stakeholder meetings	Existing reach	A greater number during Years 1-2 and as needed afterwards
	Fact sheets	Existing reach, with potential to extend around catchment	A greater number during Years 1-2 in association with on-ground works
	Case studies	Existing reach, with potential to extend around catchment	Years 2-3 as on-ground works are completed, and as needed afterwards
	Conferences	Local, regional, state and national	Annually as part of NFS Native Fish forum, and bi-annually with other identified forums
	Regional field days	Local and regional	Annually throughout the project
Education	School visits	Existing reach, with potential to extend around catchment	Years 1-3 in association with other programs (Waterwatch, NFS, etc) and as needed afterwards
	Education module	State based module with demonstration reach specific examples	Years 3-4
	School/TAFE projects	Existing reach	Years 1-3, and as needed afterwards
	Community monitoring	Existing reach	Years 3-4, and as needed afterwards
Field Days/Workshops	Demonstration days	Existing reach	Years 2-3 as on-ground works are completed, and one per year afterwards
	Open days	Existing reach	Years 1-3 as on-ground works are completed, and one per year afterwards
	Forums	Existing reach, with potential to extend around catchment	Year 4 and bi-annually afterwards
	Surveying days	Existing reach	Years 3-4, and as needed afterwards
Signage	Farm gate signs	Existing reach, identifying all project sites	Years 2-3 as on-ground works are completed, and as needed afterwards
	Interpretive signs	Existing reach, with use at specific high profile project sites	Years 2-3 as on-ground works are completed, and as needed afterwards at high profile sites
	Promotional material	Existing reach	Annually in association with on-ground activities
Media	Newspaper articles	Local, regional, state and national media outlets	Minimum of 3 articles annually, in association with on-ground works and activities
	Radio and TV interviews	Local, regional, state and national media outlets	Minimum of 3 interviews annually, in association with on-ground works and activities

## **6. Accountabilities**

To guide the development and implementation of the Namoi demonstration reach communication plan it is essential that an inclusive and effective steering committee be established. This committee should consist of representatives from local and state government agencies, as well as local community groups.

This committee, along with the project management team will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the communication plan, but ultimately, achieving the objectives of the communication strategy will be primarily the responsibility of the project manager, with assistance from the NSW Native Fish Strategy coordinator as needed.

As part of the responsibility, it is also the role of the project manager to ensure that reporting requirements are met as per contract obligations. This includes providing an update on communications activities in milestone reports (and additional updates as requested) to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, as well as providing updates to the steering committee at regular meetings.

## ATTACHMENT 1

Table 4: Community education and awareness actions currently undertaken in the Namoi demonstration reach.

Stakeholder Engagement Category	Priority Action	Priority Action Output
Awareness	4 carp musters	Events at Narrabri (2), Manilla and Boggabri (advertising, catering, prizes and promotional materials)
	10 stakeholder meetings	Range of meetings with local councils, state departments, community groups, and landholders
	5 fact sheets	Special articles that covered willows, carp, snags, fish passage and riparian revegetation distributed through local media
	10 case studies	Produced and distributed in one brochure
	Cotton CRC calendar	NAHI information included in 2009 calendar
	NAHI brochure	Introductory brochure produced in 2007
	Field guide book	<i>Fishes on Cotton Farms</i> produced in 2009
	Conferences	Poster presented at NRM Knowledge conference (2008); presentation at <i>Native fish forum</i> (2008); presentation at <i>Fishers for fish habitat</i> forum (2009)
	Regional field days	Attended AgQuip (2007 & 2008)
Promotion material NAHI	Caps and shirts	
Education	20 school visits	Completed in conjunction with carp muster events
	Education module	Contribution to <i>Teach the Reach</i> demonstration reach module
	School/TAFE projects	On-ground tree planting projects with local schools and TAFE
Field Days/Workshops	Plant propagation workshop	Aquatic plant propagation with Red Chief Land Council (2009)
	Riparian workshop	Revegetation workshop with Narrabri Amateur Fishing Club (2008)
	Community tree planting	Completed in conjunction with carp muster events at Narrabri
	2 Demo reach workshops	Initial workshops held in Narrabri and Manilla (2007)
	2 open days	Hosted during MDBA <i>Native Fish Awareness week</i> (2008 & 2009)
Signage	100 farm gate signs	Fish habitat signs identifying work sites in the demo reach
	6 fish passage signs	Identify high profile fish passage sites throughout catchment
	Case study sign	Identify high profile work site in demo reach
	Demo reach poster	Developed for use at field days and workshops
	Promotional material	Developed for use as give-aways during field days and workshops
Media	25 media/articles	Includes demo reach and fish passage media releases, local newspaper editorials, advertising, NAHI updates in electronic newsletters and websites, and journal article in <i>Ecological Management and Restoration</i> (Vol 10 No 1, April 2009)
	Radio and TV interviews	6 interviews completed in relation to start of project, carp musters and fish passage works