

Grisly find a reminder of the problem of illegal fish traps

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Five mature Southwestern Snake-necked Turtles were found dead from illegal fish traps. They were found as part of a research project to remove Koi Carp introduced into waterways. Credit: Murdoch University

Murdoch University researchers from the Harry Butler Institute recently made a heart-breaking discovery in a wetland in Perth's northern suburbs with five mature Southwestern Snake-necked Turtles found dead in illegal traps.

Drs Stephen Beatty and David Morgan made the discovery during a control program of invasive damaging introduced fishes in wetlands that is being conducted for the City of Wanneroo.

"This was a really disturbing find, but unfortunately we encounter these traps quite regularly in wetlands and rivers, particularly around Perth," Dr. Beatty said. "Whether it is kids or adults trying to catch a feed of fish or crayfish, they need to be aware that these traps are illegal, for very good reasons, and there are penalties for the use of such illegal traps."

Recent research by Ph.D. candidate at the Harry Butler Institute, Anthony Santoro, is revealing that the turtle species is under immense pressure from predation, road trauma, and habitat destruction.

"We have little understanding how many turtle deaths occur from illegal traps, but the impact could be quite severe, particularly in smaller wetlands." Mr Santoro added.

Dr. Beatty said the use of box or opera-house style fish or crayfish traps is illegal in public waterways in Western Australia due to their risk to air-breathing animals.

"Unfortunately, the baits used to attract the [fish](#) or crayfish also attract other animals that need to return to the surface to breathe, including [turtles](#), mammals and birds," Dr. Beatty said. "The animals cannot escape from these traps and while they can usually remain submerged for a few hours, death is inevitable if they are trapped overnight," Dr. Beatty added.

"Often the target is the Smooth Marron, but to ensure the sustainability of the fishery, the Fisheries Division of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development has a range of restrictions on the

type of gear that may be used during the four week marron fishing season that closed recently.

Noting the impact these traps can have on [native wildlife](#), in recent years the WA Government has been in discussions with the Commonwealth and other State jurisdictions in support of a national ban on the sale of opera-house style crayfish [traps](#).

Provided by Murdoch University

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