

Turtles Australia was recently pleased to be able to assist in the relocation of a variety of wildlife affected by maintenance work being undertaken on a central irrigation channel in Cohuna. This rebuilding project, carried out by the Northern Construction Group on behalf of Goulburn Murray Water, was being done in an effort to save 325 mega litres of water per year. We became involved after concerned local residents contacted our organisation on 23 May 2015 to report sightings of turtles leaving the channel as water was being drained and silt removed.



A photo taken of the irrigation channel before operations had begun on this area.

After discussions with the company, who proved to be extremely accommodating, it was agreed that Turtles Australia volunteer fieldworkers should travel to Cohuna on 26 May to help out. It was reported that seven turtles (not identified) had already been moved along with seventeen Murray Cod, three measuring over a metre long, the biggest being 120 cm.

Work commenced on the Wednesday morning following a site safety induction. Eight turtles were later found, six of which were Broad-shelled Turtles, one Murray River Turtle and one Eastern Longneck. Another Murray Cod and a Tandanus Catfish were also rescued.



One of the Broad-shell turtles that was recorded then released into the Gunbower Creek



Turtles Australia's Graham Stockfeld holding a female Broad-shelled Turtle that was recorded and released into the Gunbower Creek

The turtles caught that day were quite diverse in size. The largest was a female Broad-Shelled turtle that had a carapace length of 33.7cm and a width of 25.9. Our smallest was a juvenile Broad-shell with a carapace length of 8.7cm and a width of 7.7cm. It is very rare to come across such a young hatchling and this was the smallest Broad-shelled Turtle that our organisation has observed in the wild.

The Murray Cod (a critically endangered fish) which we found measured 29.5cm in length. The Tandanus Catfish, in its turn, was 30.7cm in length. Though the latter has not been evaluated it is thought to be under severe pressure from a number of invasive and native fish. Recent studies have shown that Carp have consistently been out-competing the Tandanus Catfish. Habitat destruction is one further problem that the Catfish has to contend with.

We weren't as successful in finding any turtles on the Thursday and Friday, however the Northern Construction Group rescued one which we went on to our records which are presented below.

We were thorough with our search and believe that most of the turtles have either been relocated by our members, the contractors or have moved elsewhere by themselves. There is a possibility that Turtle Australia's services may again be required as work progresses.



The Tandanus Catfish that was found on the site. We released it into the Gunbower creek



Turtles Australia Vice President Dylan Hill under a bridge trying to find any species that need relocating.



The Murray Cod that was found on the site. We released it into the Gunbower creek

The data that was recorded on the Cohuna irrigation channel site between the 27th and 29th of May

Species	Sex	Carapace Length (cm)	Carapace Width (cm)
Broad-shelled Turtle	Female	33.5	25.2
Broad-shelled Turtle	Female	33.7	25.9
Broad-shelled Turtle	Female	24.8	20.1
Broad-shelled Turtle	Male	25.2	19.4
Broad-shelled Turtle	Male	27.1	22.0
Broad-shelled Turtle	Juvenile	8.7	7.7
Murray River Turtle	Male	21.0	17.4
Murray River Turtle	Female	20.4	17.4
Eastern Longneck Turtle	Male	17.1	14.0
Murray Cod	Unknown	29.5	NA
Tandanus Catfish	Unknown	30.7	NA

We would like to thank all our members, who continue to support Turtles Australia's conservation efforts; the North Central Catchment Management Authority for their ongoing support and co-operation; the Northern Construction Group who have allowed us to assist with the relocation of the wildlife and shown such genuine interest in our work; and very importantly to the Gunbower Island Community.



The Juvenile Broad-shelled Turtle that was recovered on site.