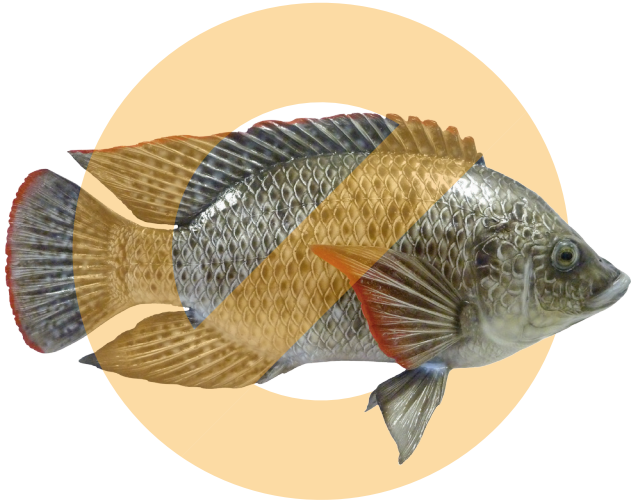


# Pest fish alert: tilapia threat

The Fitzroy Basin is at risk of becoming infested with tilapia—the ‘cane toads of the 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 middle and upper reaches of the Fitzroy Basin.

Once tilapia are established in a flowing river or creek, it is almost impossible to eradicate them.

## Why do we need to protect the Fitzroy Basin?

Covering more than a 140 000 km<sup>2</sup> of land, the Fitzroy Basin is the largest river system flowing into the iconic Great Barrier Reef lagoon. The basin has more than 20 000 km of waterways and includes six major rivers.

The Fitzroy Basin is one of the most important freshwater ecosystems in Australia. It has the greatest diversity of native freshwater fish in Australia and supports commercial and recreational fisheries significant to Queensland.

## 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 Fitzroy Basin could see the pest fish quickly dominate the water body. The result would be a loss of native fish numbers.



Male



Female



Juvenile

## How can you help?

### 1. Know how to identify tilapia

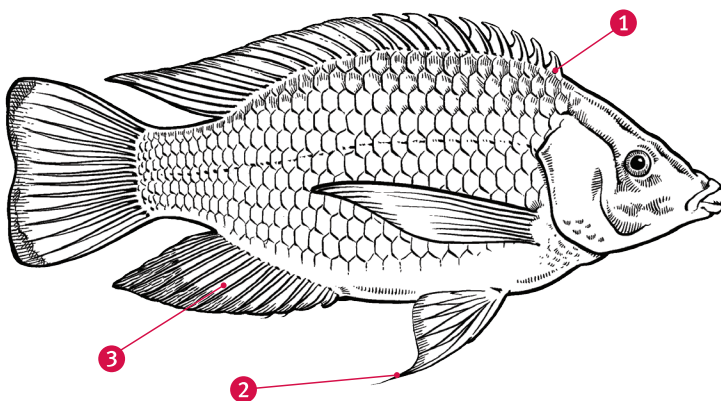
Tilapia vary in colour from dark olive to silver-grey, depending on their age and their environment.

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.

It is illegal in Queensland to possess tilapia alive or dead for any purpose. Fines may apply. Report sightings or catches of tilapia to Fisheries Queensland on **13 25 23** or at [www.fisheries.qld.gov.au](http://www.fisheries.qld.gov.au).