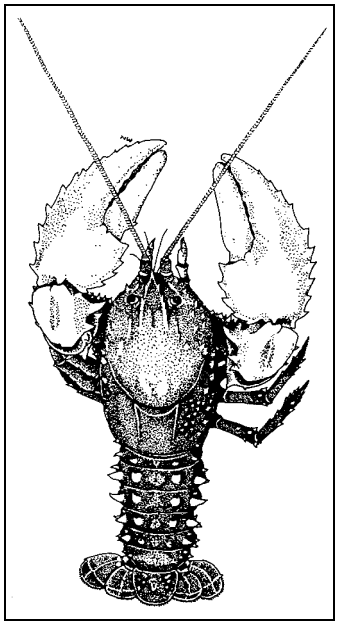
THREATENED SPECIES AND COMMUNITIES OF THE ACT

Fact Sheet No. 14 MURRAY RIVER CRAYFISH **(*Euastacus armatus*)**
A vulnerable species

The Murray River Crayfish *(Euastacus armatus*) belongs to the family Parastacidae, which includes all the freshwater crayfish within the southern hemisphere. The genus *Euastacus* includes several large crayfish species of which *E. armatus* is the largest. It is reportedly the second largest freshwater crayfish in the world, growing to three kilograms. There are 21 species of *Euastacus* known from New South Wales but this number will rise in the near future, as several new species are being described.

Adults average 20 to 30 cm in total length and are identified by their large white claws and ornately spined abdomen. The dorsal carapace colour is dark or medium green or brown, sometimes slightly tinged blue. The abdominal segments are laterally slightly tinged blue/green with the abdominal spines pale orange, cream or white. In small individuals, the claws are not white but are mottled green and yellow.



E. armatus inhabits large and small streams in a variety of habitats including cleared pasture and dry and wet sclerophyll forests at altitudes from close to sea level to over 700 m ASL. The species prefers faster flowing cool water habitats of the main channels of rivers, in contrast to the Yabby, which prefers slow warm water and billabongs.

E. armatus individuals do not reach sexual maturity until they are quite large (15 to 20 cm total length) and between six and nine years old. The larger individuals previously caught in the Murray River may have been from 20-50 years of age, but fishing pressure makes it unlikely that individuals will survive to that age now.

In lowland rivers such as the Murray and lower Murrumbidgee, the species constructs burrows in the clay river banks for shelter. In the upland rivers with stony beds such as the Tumut, Goobarragandra and upper Murrumbidgee, the species tends to use the interstitial spaces between boulders and cobbles on the river bed for shelter.

Within the ACT, *E. armatus* is mainly found in the Murrumbidgee River, but has also been recorded from the Cotter and Paddys rivers.

Conservation threats
The major threats to the continued survival of native aquatic species in freshwater habitats are habitat alteration, overfishing and possibly interactions with introduced fish species, including *E. armatus*.

Conservation actions
Environment ACT will investigate options for rehabilitating critical aquatic habitats. These options include the selective removal of sand to restore critical pool/riffle habitats and provision of additional cover such as snags or boulders.

The possibility of re-establishing a population of Murray River Crayfish in Cotter Reservoir will be investigated. Environment ACT will survey the Paddys River catchment for the species, and will establish a monitoring program for the species at a representative suite of sites in the ACT.

Environment ACT will encourage research into a number of priority areas with key information gaps. These include habitat management, effects of introduced species and age at first breeding. Environment ACT is providing signage along the Murrumbidgee and Cotter rivers in the ACT to assist anglers identify threatened aquatic species.

The primary source of information for this Fact Sheet is the conservation **Action Plan** where a full bibliography is available.
Action Plans are available from the Environment ACT Homepage:
http://act.gov.au/environ
Environment ACT Helpline: (02) 6207 9777

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