Echuca Moama: Everything for Everyone

Stephen Booth | August 2001 » Feature Articles / Queensland / Southern QLD / Brisbane /

The Murray River border towns of Echuca and Moama are magnets for anglers and holidaymakers for varied reasons.

Anglers love the chance to get on the Murray or its tributaries and chase the fabled Murray cod, golden perch and freshwater crayfish. Holidaymakers are spoilt for choice, as Echuca Moama is one of the strongholds of paddle steamer history and the area is filled with wineries, farmstays, historic walks and parklands waiting to be explored.

The towns had substantial amounts of water go through various areas at the start of 2011 but have bounced back and are ready to help you enjoy your time on the magical Murray River.

Captain Charles Sturt first visited the area in 1830 as he travelled the length of the Murrumbidgee River, which flows into the Murray River hundreds of kilometres downstream near Boundary Bend. James Maiden established the actual settlement of Moama in 1845. Moama was originally called Maidens Punt but was renamed Moama in 1851.

Henry Hopwood founded Echuca in 1850 when he began Hopwood’s Ferry near the junction of the Campaspe and Murray rivers, after a stint in jail. Hopwood worked to establish a town, which eventually had a major influence on the development of the great inland river system. When he died in 1869 he left a thriving town where nothing had existed 16 years earlier, when he built his first slab Inn.

These are now vibrant towns with around 20,000 residents in the area. Much of the natural redgum forest remains within State Parks and, combined with hard work to rehabilitate the Barmah Choke upstream from Echuca Moama, has meant the natural environment is holding its own and still supplying true outback Australian experiences to thousands of visitors.

While the Murray provides the life blood of the region as a playground used by traditional Paddlesteamers, powerboats, canoes, fisherman and swimmers, other attractions, wineries, museums, vast expanses of lush native forests, absorbing examples of historical architecture and many venues for sporting and cultural pursuits all make today’s Echuca an exciting holiday destination.

There are three main targets for anglers fishing the Echuca Moama area: Murray cod, golden perch and freshwater (Murray) crayfish. Other species encountered include the fully protected (in rivers) silver perch, the introduced redfin and carp, and very occasionally the endangered trout cod and catfish, which are also fully protected.

There are also plenty of yabbies and shrimp to be collected for bait and food. Please be absolutely sure of where you are fishing as the entire Murray River is NSW water and requires a NSW fishing licence to fish, even if you are fishing from the Victorian side. However, the Victorian tributaries such as the Goulburn and Campaspe rivers require a Victorian fishing licence.

COD

Murray cod are the iconic fish of the river and are abundant around Echuca Moama. From the Barmah Choke down through Echuca and Torrumbarry Weir, the cod is the fish most anglers are keen to tangle with.

Catching a cod can be as simple as throwing in a shrimp or two on a running sinker rig next to a snag or as complicated as casting a particular lure to a knotted mess of timber in the hope of extracting a monster. Many anglers even find themselves hooked up to a cod while fishing clean water over sand banks in the early morning or late evenings.

For a legal-sized cod (60cm), you are far better off targeting lots of timber. Cod have a preference for big snags that break up the current, making horizontal snags prime territory – the bigger the better. Casting lures or baits into these areas will be rewarded but patience is required to catch a legal fish because sub-60cm cod are abundant.

Big fish are powerful brutes that require luck and good angling skills. Most anglers choose lines of 30lb to 50lb, especially for bigger fish. Sturdy threadline or baitcast tackle is required and, if fishing bait, attention to the rod is a must. The number of rods and reels lost over the side of the boat or pulled in off the bank is testament to the power of these fish.

Another popular way to connect to a Murray cod is to troll hardbodied lures. This is relatively easy and allows the angler to cover lots of territory. Choose a lure that dives to the approximate depth of the bottom and start trolling as slow as the boat will go.

The lure should shuffle and bump across the bottom and over logs, inciting a strike from a hungry, or angry cod.

Cod are a precious native species and most anglers these days release their catch, however keeping a fish for a feed just may cap off a wonderful day. Remember the size limits and the closed season from September 1 to November 30.

GOLDEN PERCH

Golden perch or yellowbelly are common and many reach over 50cm. They school loosely and quite often when you catch one you will...
catch a few.

Goldens like woody structure just like cod, but are more common on smaller and newer snags.

Goldens readily take yabbies, shrimp and scrub worms. Lure fishing for goldens is also very productive with cast or trolled lures from around 5cm to 9cm most productive. These smaller lures will also appeal to cod, so be prepared for anything to come along.

Lighter outfits can be used for golden perch with the majority of anglers using 20lb line just in case a cod happens along. Goldens hit a lure hard and fast but after an initial rush towards their snaggy homes, most goldens can be quite easily landed.

Golden perch are stocked in the local waterways so their populations are very good so keeping a golden for a feed is not an issue as long as you respect size and bag limits.

Unlike cod, goldens do move around a bit and can be found just about anywhere. This makes it incredibly difficult to recommend hot spots to start your search. Find likely habitat, give it 15 to 30 minutes and move on if you don’t catch one.

CRAYFISH

The freshwater crayfish is one of the strangest of the Murray’s inhabitants. They are spiky, prehistoric-looking creatures fearsomely strong and can be a little dangerous if running free in the bottom of your tinnie!

Crays have a particular liking for cooler water, making them popular targets when the native fish slow down in Winter.

Freshwater crayfish are caught in baited hoop nets that must be regularly checked. The crayfish is attracted to a bait of fish or flesh tied into the hoop net and while it is feasting on the bait, the angler pulls the pot, securing the crayfish.

Placement of pots is important because the crays tend to run along a particular depth or on a particular bottom type and the only way to discover where they are is to work an area by moving unsuccessful pots after 2 or 3 pulls (pulls are generally 15-30 minutes apart) to a different depth or to a different bottom.

Crays can be caught just about anywhere from sandy bottom to hard clay and even over slower sections that have lots of accumulated debris, so it pays to try them all.

Crayfish are heavily regulated with restrictions on the gear you can use, on when you can fish for them and also on the size and number of crayfish you can keep. Learn these regulations before going but do give it a try, they are as tasty as they are mean-looking!

Some of the better starting points include the slower water found above Torrumbarry Weir, areas of harder clay and slower pools with water depths around 10-20 feet.

Facts

ACCOMMODATION

A vibrant tourism destination, Echuca and Moama have accommodation options to suit every budget and taste, from 5-star rooms to unpowered camp sites or a bit of state forest.

For a wide-ranging run-down on accommodation options, pick up an August issue of Victoria Fishing Monthly for a vastly expanded guide to the district.

Facts

ATTRACTIONS

From the Historic Port of Echuca, home to Australia’s largest fleet of paddle steamers, to the unique small towns and villages, each with their own charm, there are masses of attractions for the whole family.

This region is justifiably famous for the richness of its agriculture and horticulture, so a town like Tongala will pride itself on its milkshakes and dairy produce while another, like Kyabram, will be justifiably proud of its fruit. Get out there and enjoy them all.

The wilderness of the Gunbower and Barmah-Millewa forests offer tranquil relaxation, birdwatching and a rich natural history, while closer to
town, or in it, are great family experiences like the Golden Cow Dairy Centre, Rich River Golf Club Resort, Great Aussie Beer Shed, Holden Museum, Sharps Magic Movie House, Billabong Ranch, Jaengenya Wines and Oz Maze and Oz Mini Golf, for starters.

Facts

EVENTS

Moama RSL Fishing Competition: The Echuca Moama RSL & Citizens Club Fishing Classic is a great fun family weekend on the Murray River in March or April. With around 22km of river to fish, there has to be a spot for you. Friday night there are registrations and almost $5000 worth of prizes to be raffled off. Make sure you’re part of the entertaining Lure Wall where you can donate your unlucky or unused lures onto the wall. One lucky angler will then win every lure on the wall.

After your day on the water it’s back to the Club for Sensational Saturday with a boat/motor/trailer given away as well as another $5000 of fantastic raffle prizes. After a few hours on the water on Sunday trying to catch that winning fish, it’s back to the club for a barbecue lunch and the presentations.

To find out more about this event in 2012 email --e-mail address hidden-- or visit www.rslmoama.com.au.

Echuca Farmers Market: Brought to you by the Central Murray Produce Group, this famous market features some serious and wonderful taste sensations from the local region as well as cooked breakfast and freshly brewed coffee from 8.30am to 11.30am. For more information visit www.vicfarmersmarkets.org.au.

Winter Blues: If this issue of the magazine is hot off the press, there’s still time to hit the Winter Blues Festival on July 29-31. Enjoy the ambience of the historic port precinct with its restaurants, cafes, pubs, cellar outlets, attractions and specialty shops whilst listening to great blues music. Visit www.winterblues.com.au to find out more about this year’s sensational line-up of artists.

Facts

VISITOR CENTRE

Make sure you drop into the visitor centre or log on to www.echucamoama.com for all the information you’ll need to make your stay a pleasure. Freecall 1800 804 446 or for general information email --e-mail address hidden--. The Echuca Moama Visitor Information Centre is at 2 Heygarth St, Echuca.

Facts

FISHING

• JTs Fishing and Camping, 16 Meninya St, Moama, NSW, 2731 (03) 5480 3868

• Murray River Fishing Tours 1997 Restdown Rd, Echuca West, 0418 576 526
SOME FISHING REGULATIONS

NSW

If you are fishing in the Murray River, even from the Victorian bank, you will need a NSW Fishing Licence and abide by NSW Fishing Regulations. Some important regulations include, but are not restricted to:

**Murray cod**
- Closed season runs from 1 September through to 30 November inclusive
- Minimum size limit is 60cm
- Bag limit is 2 per angler in possession with only 1 fish allowed to be over 100cm (1m)

**Golden perch**
- Minimum size limit is 30cm
- Bag limit is 5 per angler in possession

**Freshwater crayfish**
- Closed season runs from 1 September through to 30 April inclusive
- Minimum size limit is 9cm carapace length
- Bag limit is 5 per angler in possession with only 1 crayfish allowed to be over 12cm carapace length, females in berry totally protected

*more information can be obtained by visiting www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fisheries/recreational/regulations.

Vic Regulations

If you fish in the Campaspe and Goulburn rivers or Broken and Gunbower creeks, which are all Victorian waters, you will need a Victorian Fishing Licence and abide by Victorian Fishing Regulations. Some important regulations include, but are not restricted to:

**Murray cod**
- Closed season runs from 1 September through to 30 November inclusive
- Minimum size limit is 60cm
- Bag limit is 2 per angler in possession with no fish allowed to be over 100cm (1m)

**Golden perch**
- Minimum size limit is 30cm
- Bag limit is 5 per angler in possession from rivers

**Freshwater crayfish**
- Closed season runs from 1 September through to 30 April inclusive
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*more information can be obtained by visiting www.dpi.vic.gov.au/dpi/fisheries and following the links to recreational fishing.

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