



Summit Purpose

This briefing note provides context for participants attending the Murray–Darling Carp Action Alliance Summit. It outlines the current state of carp management in Australia, the rationale for convening the Summit, and the intended outcomes for the day.

As we all know, Australia’s freshwater ecosystems, particularly across the Murray–Darling Basin, are under sustained pressure from a range of interacting factors including climate variability, water extraction, habitat modification and invasive species.

Among these pressures, European carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) are widely recognised as a significant contributor to degraded river health. In many parts of the Basin, carp dominate fish biomass and are associated with reduced water quality, loss of aquatic vegetation, and impacts on native species and habitats.

Over several decades, governments, researchers and communities have invested in understanding the scale of the challenge and identifying potential management responses. This includes the development of the National Carp Control Plan and ongoing work through the Carp Biological Control Program, which is assessing a range of control options, including biological, mechanical and integrated approaches.

Despite this substantial body of work, there is currently no single, coordinated national approach to carp management. Efforts remain distributed across jurisdictions, sectors and communities, often operating at different scales and with varying objectives.

The Murray–Darling Carp Action Alliance has emerged in response to this context. It reflects a shared recognition that, alongside continued research and investment, there is a need to strengthen coordination, align efforts and support more effective pathways to implementation.

The Summit provides an opportunity to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders to share knowledge, test ideas and explore how a more connected and collaborative approach to carp management could be progressed.

The case for urgency

Australia is facing an ecological crisis in our rivers. Carp accounts for up to 90 percent of fish biomass in parts of the Murray–Darling Basin, a system already under intense pressure from climate change, over-extraction and habitat loss. These fish are not just a nuisance - they are reshaping ecosystems. They rip up water plants, destroy the homes of native fish and frogs, and push out the wildlife that makes our rivers special. Yet,

despite over a decade of research and 13 million dollars invested in a biocontrol solution, no decision has been made.

Meanwhile, carp numbers are growing. Following the 2022 floods, estimates placed the population at a staggering 375 million across the Murray–Darling Basin. Every delay in action increases the ecological cost. The National Carp Control Plan has outlined a scientifically robust, species-specific viral biocontrol - but the federal government continues to defer a decision.



Why listing carp as a key threatening process matters

Common carp are not currently listed as a standalone key threatening process under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act. This needs to change.

Listing carp would require the development of a national threat abatement plan which would mean the same level of action and coordination used to control rabbits, foxes, cane toads and feral pigs. It would formalise the recognition that carp are not just a regional issue but a national biodiversity threat, impacting over 97 percent of large rivers in eastern Australia. The scientific evidence shows carp affect dozens of threatened species, including iconic animals like the Murray cod and platypus, and critically endangered invertebrates like the Darling River snail. Their feeding behaviour increases turbidity, uproots aquatic plants, and degrades habitats relied on by fish, birds, frogs and mussels.

In 2025 the Victorian Fisheries Authority nominated to list carp under the EPBC Act. The nomination met all three scientific criteria for a key threatening process - yet it was rejected. The stated reason? That “established abatement arrangements and emerging

technologies” are already in place. This is misleading. No approved or funded national-scale control is currently operational. The carp virus remains unapproved and untried. Listing would break the policy gridlock and require governments to act with the same urgency they have for other invasive species.

Carp Threat Abatement Plan

Carp cannot receive a national Threat Abatement Plan until they are formally listed as a Key Threatening Process under the EPBC Act. Listing is the essential first step, because it provides official recognition that carp are causing a nationally significant impact on native species, habitats and ecological communities. Without this listing, carp sit outside the federal framework for coordinated threat management, meaning there is no statutory requirement for national action, no formal mandate for cross-jurisdiction cooperation and no mechanism for setting unified objectives, milestones or monitoring obligations. Listing elevates carp from being “a known problem” to a nationally recognised ecological threat that demands structured intervention.

Once carp are listed as a threatening process, the Minister must decide whether a Threat Abatement Plan is the most effective mechanism to address the threat. A TAP is the only national tool that can create a coordinated, long-term, science-based approach to carp management, set priorities, define responsibilities, and establish clear accountability. It also strengthens the case for funding because it identifies specific actions and allows investment to be aligned against nationally endorsed priorities. In short, listing carp as a Key Threatening Process unlocks the policy pathway for a TAP, provides the formal recognition needed to secure funding, and ensures carp are no longer managed through fragmented, under-resourced programs but through a coordinated national strategy.

Addressing the delay on carp virus – what is going on?

The delay in approving the carp virus is political, not scientific. We know it is not the only option for addressing carp, but it could be an effective tool amongst those we already have (but are unfunded). The CSIRO and National Carp Control Plan both concluded that the virus is species-specific. It does not infect native fish, birds, livestock or humans. Studies involved injecting 22 native species with the virus and none were infected. Internationally, the virus is found in 26 countries with no cross-species infection ever recorded.

The virus is not a silver bullet - it will not eradicate carp entirely however, it is the most scalable, basin-wide solution available. Models show it could reduce carp populations by 40 to 60 percent, particularly in areas where density exceeds 200 kilograms per hectare - the threshold where ecological collapse often begins. The federal government must decide on release by 2027. Yet, no clear roadmap exists. Further trials are planned, but without timelines, investment or regulatory approval, the process risks

indefinite delay. Each year the ecological cost rises - more native species lost, more habitats degraded.

Mythbusting carp concerns

"The virus will kill everything in the water."

False. The carp virus only infects common and carp hybrid species (like koi). It has never infected humans, mammals, reptiles or native fish. This has been confirmed by the CSIRO and the World Organisation for Animal Health.

"The virus will wipe out all carp and collapse the food web."

No. The virus is expected to reduce carp by 40 to 60 percent, not eliminate them entirely. In flowing rivers, carcasses are unlikely to affect water quality. In wetlands, response plans will be ready, including harvesting or managed flushing.

"We can control carp with nets, traps or fishing."

This is partially true, and we would like to have the support for communities to undertake these activities. Local efforts like carp musters and trapping can help in isolated sites but are not effective at the basin scale. Without a biocontrol agent, these methods cannot address explosive breeding after flood events.

"We should wait for more research."

Thirteen million dollars and ten years of work have already been completed. The virus has passed host specificity tests. Further delay is no longer about science - it's about political will.

"Native fish might still be at risk."

Not supported by evidence. Native fish have been tested with the virus, including through injection. No signs of infection or disease occurred in any native species tested in Australia.

"We don't need an EPBC listing — it's already being managed."

Wrong. There is no active, national-scale management plan for carp. Listing them under the EPBC Act would force coordination, funding, and accountability.

What needs to happen now

1. Establish the Murray-Darling Carp Action Alliance as a shared recognition that, alongside continued research and investment, there is a need to strengthen coordination, align efforts and support more effective pathways to implementation
2. List carp as a key threatening process under the EPBC Act. This would unlock federal mechanisms for coordination and funding.
3. Approve a trial of the carp virus in enclosed or semi-controlled environments, with monitoring and risk protocols.

4. Publish a decision roadmap for the carp biocontrol program, with clear regulatory milestones.
5. Invest in complementary methods like fish passage improvements, wetland rehabilitation, trapping and community engagement.
6. Support First Nations and community-based programs already trying to reduce carp.

Conclusion

The Murray–Darling Carp Action Alliance Summit will support a coordinated and collaborative approach to carp management across the Basin. By bringing together a diverse range of perspectives, including science, policy, community, industry and First Nations knowledge, the Summit aims to strengthen shared understanding of the challenge and identify practical opportunities for improved alignment and action.

A key outcome of the Summit will be the development of a Murray–Darling Carp Action Alliance Statement. This statement is intended to reflect areas of common understanding and shared priorities identified through the day. Participants will be invited to indicate their support for the statement as a way of signalling collective commitment to improved coordination and collaboration in carp management across the Basin.

The statement will not prescribe specific policy positions. Rather, it will provide a foundation for ongoing engagement, helping to connect existing efforts and support more integrated, evidence-based approaches over time. Your contribution to the Summit will play an important role in shaping this shared outcome.

Your convenors:



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