

Brown Bullhead Catfish – Code of Practice

Effective from 1 October 2007.

A guide to reducing the risk of catfish being introduced to new areas

MFish has prepared this Code of Practice to reduce the risks of catfish being taken accidentally and introduced to new areas. Fishers can unintentionally take catfish when fishing for other species like eels.

The aim of this Code of Practice is to reduce the impacts of catfish on native New Zealand freshwater species and the aquatic environment.

Catfish Background

Catfish were introduced to New Zealand to the Auckland region in 1877, and since then their numbers have grown significantly, mainly in the northern part of the North Island. Catfish are now widespread in the Waikato River system including Lake Taupo, where they are present in large numbers. They are also found in one isolated area on the West Coast of the South Island. Further spread of this species is highly undesirable.

Brown bullhead catfish (*Ameiurus nebulosus*) are a problem in New Zealand because they damage the environment by eating small native fish and fish eggs. They also compete for food with other native species, including freshwater crayfish. Catfish stir up mud which reduces water quality for other animals and plants.

Catfish are robust fish with whisker-like barbels on their heads and sharp spines on their fins. They prefer slow flowing streams and the edges of lakes. They often live among water plants. They grow up to about 2 kg in New Zealand. Catfish can survive in a wide range of temperatures and poor water quality. They can also survive for a long time out of water and can be difficult to kill.



Catfish Laws

The following laws apply to catfish:

1. If a non-commercial fisher catches a catfish, they must kill it immediately. The penalty for possessing live catfish for non-commercial fishers is \$750.¹
2. The sale of live catfish is prohibited. Commercial fishers must kill all catfish before selling them to a licensed fish receiver. The penalty for a commercial fisher selling live catfish is a fine of up to \$20,000.²
3. An authorisation is required to release any live animals or plants into any freshwater area. Failure to have an authorisation could mean a fine of up to \$5000.³

CODE OF PRACTICE

FOR NON-COMMERCIAL FISHERS

- ✓ Inspect your fishing gear, boats and boat trailers before leaving boat ramps.
- ✓ Remove all catfish, larvae and eggs from vehicles, boat trailers and fishing gear before leaving boat ramps.
- ✓ Clean all your freshwater fishing gear in salt baths, including fyke nets and hinaki. Salt water will kill freshwater fish, including catfish. (See salt bath protocol below).

FOR COMMERCIAL FISHERS

- ✓ Inspect your boats and boat trailers before leaving boat ramps.
- ✓ Remove all unwanted catfish, larvae and eggs from vehicles, boat trailers and fishing gear before leaving boat ramps.
- ✓ Clean all your freshwater fishing gear in salt baths, including fyke nets and hinaki. (See salt bath protocol below).
- ✓ Use covered or secure bins or tanks when you transport catfish to a licensed fish receiver to ensure no catfish can escape.
- ✓ Commercial fishers are required to kill all catfish before sale to a licensed fish receiver. If possible, kill **all** catfish you have caught, even those that you do not intend to sell.

¹ Fisheries (Amateur Fishing) Regulations 1986

² Fisheries (Commercial Fishing) Regulations 2001

³ Conservation Act 1987

SALT BATH PROTOCOL

Materials required

- A drum or water trough large enough to soak your nets in
- A container to measure the salt and water (eg. a bucket)
- Standard table or agricultural salt
- Fresh water (or sea water)

Procedure

1. Make up a salt bath by adding **1 part salt to 14 parts fresh water** by volume to a drum or trough that is big enough to soak the nets in.
2. Mix until all the salt has dissolved. This will usually take less than 5 minutes, longer in cooler temperatures.
3. Soak nets in the salt water solution for 1 hour or more.
4. It is advisable to rinse fishing gear in fresh water after salt bath treatment.
5. Nets can be reused immediately or stored for later use in the normal way

Reuse, safety and disposal of treatment solution

The salt water solution can be reused many times as long as the salt is not diluted by putting very wet nets into the solution. Try to drain nets as much as possible to avoid diluting the bath. If in doubt, add further salt to the bath or mix a fresh solution.

Sea water may be used in place of freshwater to form part of the solution. Sea water already contains salt so you will need only need to add **1 part salt to 28 parts seawater** to obtain the right concentration. Brackish water from estuaries will not be salty enough and should be treated as freshwater.

Further dilute the salt solution when you dispose of the salt bath, to prevent damage to the aquatic environment.

Remember!

- To be 100% effective in killing catfish, fishing gear must be treated in salt baths of 1 part salt to 14 parts water, for at least 1 hour.
- Each time you fish in a different river catchment there is the potential to transfer catfish. You should treat fishing gear in salt baths before fishing in the next river catchment.
- Treatment of fishing gear in salt baths is also 100% effective in killing other problem species including koi carp, gambusia (mosquito fish) and the freshwater invasive alga didymo.

If you are unsure about any aspect of the regulations or the Code of Practice, visit the Ministry of Fisheries website www.fish.govt.nz, or phone your nearest Ministry of Fisheries Office.

Sustainable fisheries within a healthy aquatic ecosystem.