

Fish fauna of the Fitzroy River in the Kimberley region of Western Australia – including the Bunuba, Gooniyandi, Ngarinyin, Nyikina and Walmajarri Aboriginal names

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Abstract – This project surveyed the fish fauna of the Fitzroy River, one of Australia's largest river systems that remains unregulated, located in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. A total of 37 fish species were recorded in the 70 sites sampled. Twenty-three of these species are freshwater fishes (i.e. they complete their life-cycle in freshwater), the remainder being of estuarine or marine origin that may spend part of their life-cycle in freshwater. The number of freshwater species in the Fitzroy River is high by Australian standards. Three of the freshwater fish species recorded are currently undescribed, and two have no formal common or scientific names, but do have Aboriginal names. Where possible, the English (common), scientific and Aboriginal names for the different species of the river are given. This includes the Aboriginal names of the fish for the following five languages (Bunuba, Gooniyandi, Ngarinyin, Nyikina and Walmajarri) of the Fitzroy River Valley. The fish fauna of the river was shown to be significantly different between each of the lower, middle and upper reaches of the main channel. Furthermore, the smaller tributaries and the upper gorge country sites were significantly different to those in the main channel, while the major billabongs of the river had fish assemblages significantly different to all sites with the exception of the middle reaches of the river. The previously known ranges of many species were extended. The implications of damming the Fitzroy River are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The Kimberley region of Western Australia is home to a unique assemblage of freshwater fishes that is exposed to high summer rainfall and a dry winter period. Much of the landscape is rugged, with vehicular access seasonally limited. This, together with the isolation of the region, has resulted in only limited distributional fish faunal surveys being conducted. Fish surveys have often revealed species that are new to science, or have greatly extended the ranges of the species captured. The most notable surveys of the Kimberley include those on the Gibb River Road to the Drysdale River (by Rosen, Nelson and Butler in 1969 for the American Museum of Natural History), the Ord River area (McKay, 1971), the Prince Regent River (Allen, 1975), Drysdale River (Hutchins, 1977), Mitchell, King Edward and Lawley rivers (Hutchins, 1981), Hutchins and Chapman (Hutchins, unpublished data) surveyed the Gibb River Road in 1975 (see Hutchins, 1981), Allen and Allen sampled stream crossings on the Gibb River and Kulumburu roads (Allen and Allen,

unpublished data) and Allen and Leggett (1990) sampled numerous sites on the Isdell, Mitchell, King Edward, Drysdale and Ord rivers. Surprisingly, the largest river of the Kimberley, the Fitzroy, which drains over one-third of the region, has only been surveyed in a few easily accessed locations (see Allen and Leggett, 1990).

The Fitzroy River is large by Western Australian standards, draining almost 90 000 km², and is largely uncleared, with its water non-saline throughout most of its length (Anon, 1993; Storey, 1998). The Fitzroy River is one of the largest unregulated rivers in Australia, but has recently been identified as having the potential to supply quality water to not only the Kimberley, but also other parts of Australia (Anon, 1993, Storey, 1998). A number of dam sites have been recognised including Dimond Gorge and Margaret Gorge (Anon, 1993). While providing water for agriculture and domestic uses, the proposed dams have been seen by some as a means of controlling natural flooding in the Fitzroy River floodplain (Anon, 1993).

The Fitzroy River catchment experiences a semi-

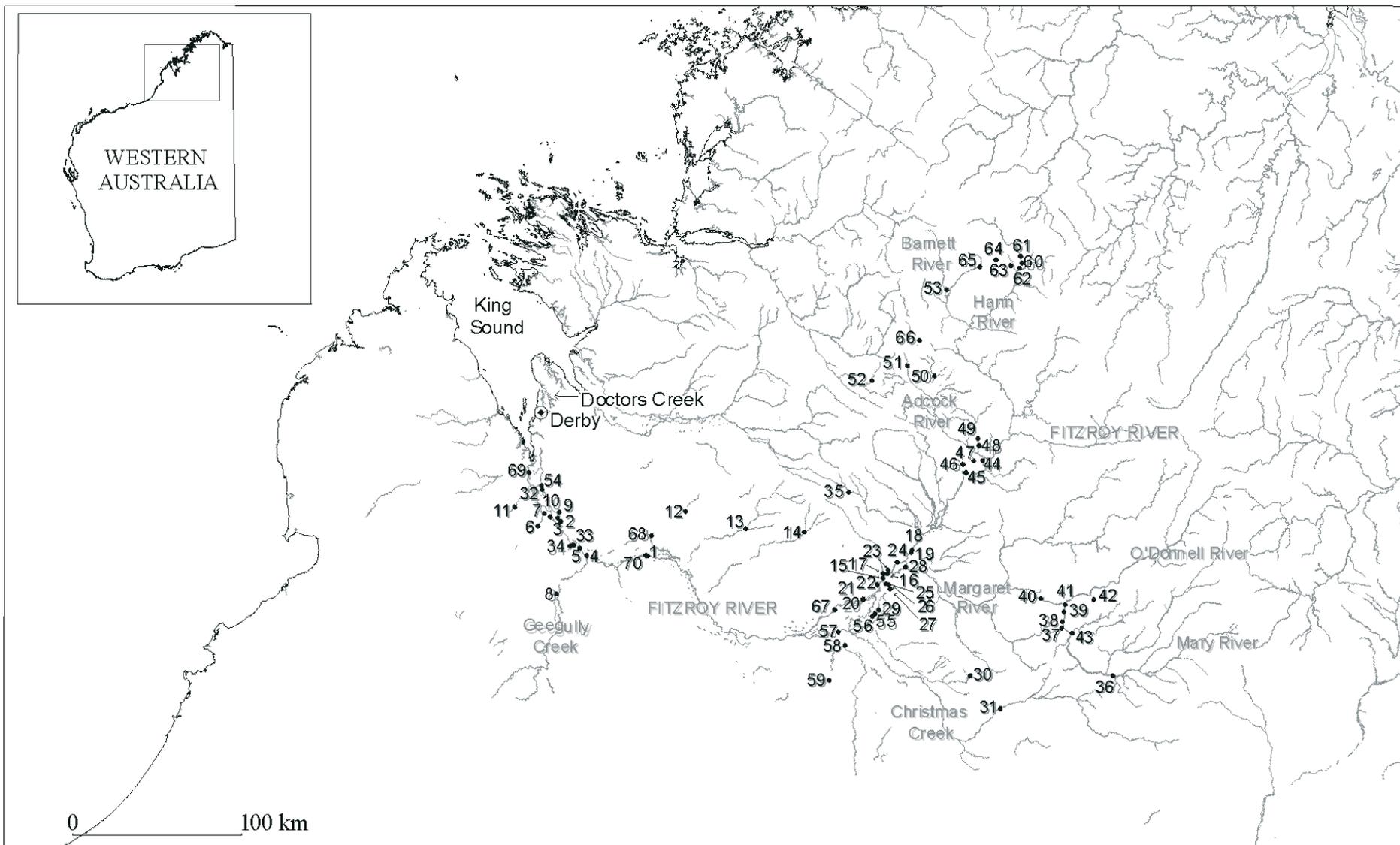


Figure 1 The sites sampled for fish in the Fitzroy River, Western Australia.

arid to arid monsoonal climate receiving most (~90%) of its rainfall between November and March (i.e. the wet season) (Goh, 1998; Ruprecht and Rodgers, 1998). Upstream of Fitzroy Crossing the river catchment covers approximately 45 000 km² and divides into two main tributaries, the Fitzroy and Margaret rivers, which also encompass the high relief reaches of the river (Ruprecht and Rodgers, 1998). The main tributaries of the upper Fitzroy include the Hann, Adcock, Louisa and Little Fitzroy rivers, while those of the Margaret include the Mary, Leopold, O'Donnell, Gidden, Little Gold and Laura rivers (see Figure 1) (Ruprecht and Rodgers, 1998). Downstream of Fitzroy Crossing lies the river floodplain, which extends some 300 km to the coast, and includes the tributaries of Christmas, Mt Hardman, Mt Wynne and Geegully creeks. The mean annual streamflow of 6 150 GL/year (since the 1950s) at Fitzroy Crossing is the highest of any river system recorded in Western Australia (Ruprecht and Rodgers, 1998). While flows peak during the wet season, in the dry season flow may cease with the river becoming a series of disconnected pools and billabongs. Turbidity is also seasonally affected, with highest turbidities coinciding with peak flows during the wet season (Ruprecht and Rodgers, 1998).

The present study represents part of an ongoing collaboration between Murdoch University, the Kimberley Land Council, the Kimberley Language Resource Centre and the local community, including the traditional owners and station owners, of the Fitzroy River catchment. The importance of the Fitzroy River to the Aboriginal people of the region is highlighted in this report, and where possible, the Bunuba, Gooniyandi, Ngarinyin, Nyikina, Walmajarri, English (common) and scientific names are given for each fish species recorded from the Fitzroy River system. A further aim of this project was to address the notable lack of distributional data for the fish fauna of the Fitzroy River, while also examining the fish faunal associations within the various habitat types of the river. Furthermore, the importance of the river to the people of the Kimberley region and the conservation issues affecting fish distributions are discussed.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sampling for fish

During four two-week surveys, between April 2001 and November 2002, and two short field trips in March and December 2002, a total of 70 sites were sampled for fish throughout the main channel of the Fitzroy River, its tributaries and associated wetlands/billabongs (see Appendix 1). Many of the sites are of Aboriginal significance and located

within areas covered by native title applications, and the survey team was guided by traditional owners and their knowledge. With the exception of one site (Telegraph Pool), all sites sampled in the river were above the limit of tidal influence. Additionally, species recorded in the estuary and Doctor's Creek, near the mouth of the Fitzroy River (see Figure 1), during opportunistic sampling, are included in the results.

Sampling equipment included a variety of seine nets [1 m (1 mm mesh), 5, 10 and 15 m (all 3 mm mesh), 26 m (6 and 3 mm mesh) and a 60 m (10 and 5 mm mesh)], gill nets (25 to 125 mm stretched mesh sizes), cast nets, masks and snorkels and hooks and lines.

Active participants included the Centre for Fish and Fisheries Research at Murdoch University, the Land + Sea Management Unit at the Kimberley Land Council (KLC), the Fitzroy Crossing Kimberley Language Resource Centre (KLRC), station owners and tenants, and community members from Broome, Derby and Fitzroy Crossing and their surrounds, including the Bunuba, Gooniyandi, Ngarinyin, Nyikina and Walmajarri traditional owners.

Environmental variables

The conductivity, temperature and pH of water taken just below the surface were recorded at each sample site.

Species identification and maps

Each species captured was photographed with some specimens preserved for identification and for the collections of the Western Australian Museum. The majority of fish were released alive after capture. The phylogenetic order of the families (and the subsequent species list) follows Nelson (1994). Longitude and latitude were recorded at each site using a Global Positioning System (GPS). The sample sites map was created using the above GPS data and MapInfo (MapInfo Corporation, 1998).

Classification of sample sites and Analysis of Similarity (ANOSIM)

In order to test the hypothesis that fish faunal composition would vary between the lower (sites 1–6, 9, 32–34, 54, 68, 70), middle (15–16, 18–20, 28, 57, 67) and upper (36–41, 44–45) reaches of the main channel/major tributaries of the river and also the smaller tributaries (sites 8, 11–14, 17, 22–25, 27, 30–31, 35, 43, 46–52, 55–56, 58–59), the large lentic billabongs (sites 7, 10, 21, 26, 29) and the upper gorge country e.g. upper Hann River (sites 42, 53, 60–66) (see Figure 1), the sample sites were *a priori* allocated to one of these broad habitat categories and their fish community structures compared using one-way analysis of similarity (ANOSIM) in PRIMER (Clarke and Gorley, 2001).

In order to test for differences in community structure, a presence-absence data set of the different species captured in the 70 sites sampled in the Fitzroy River catchment was used to construct a similarity matrix employing the Bray-Curtis similarity coefficient in the PRIMER package (Clarke and Gorley, 2001). The presence-absence data were considered to be more appropriate than abundance data for a number of reasons: 1. Water

levels, and thus sampling efficiency, varied greatly between the sampling periods, i.e. late wet and late dry; 2. The level of sampling effort was governed by site characteristics, e.g. size and depth; 3. The requirement of a number of capture techniques to effectively sample the variety of species in the different sites, e.g. different meshed seine nets (larger net generally equals larger mesh size), mask and snorkel only in clear waters, seine nets not as

Table 1 The sites at which the different freshwater fish species were captured in the Fitzroy River (see Figure 1 for site localities and Table 3 for common and Aboriginal names).

Freshwater species	Site numbers	Total
Anguillidae		
<i>Anguilla bicolor</i> McClelland, 1844	18	1
Clupeidae		
<i>Nematalosa erebi</i> (Günther, 1868)	1–9, 11–12, 15–20, 23, 25–27, 29–34, 36–45, 49–50, 54, 57–59, 61–62, 65–68	49
Ariidae		
<i>Arius graeffei</i> Kner and Steindachner, 1867	1, 3–4, 18–19, 26, 29, 32, 34, 36, 38–41, 44–45, 57, 67–70	21
Plotosidae		
<i>Anodontiglanis dahli</i> Rendahl, 1922	1–2, 4, 10, 12, 25, 34, 68	8
<i>Neosilurus ater</i> (Perugia, 1894)	45	1
<i>Neosilurus hyrtlii</i> Steindachner, 1867	1–7, 9–10, 12–19, 24, 29–34, 36, 38, 42–43, 45, 47, 54, 63–64	33
<i>Neosilurus pseudospinosus</i> Allen and Feinberg, 1998	36, 38, 42, 45, 53	5
<i>Porochilus rendahli</i> (Whitley, 1928)	10, 12, 15, 21, 24, 26, 29, 56	8
Belonidae		
<i>Strongylura krefftii</i> (Günther, 1866)	1, 3–4, 6, 9, 15–18, 20, 23, 26, 29, 32–34, 37, 39–41, 44–45, 67–68	24
Melanotaeniidae		
<i>Melanotaenia australis</i> (Castelnau, 1875)	2, 4–9, 12–15, 17–31, 33, 35–43, 45–54, 58–66, 68	56
Atherinidae		
<i>Craterocephalus lentiginosus</i> Ivantsoff, Crowley and Allen, 1987	7, 10, 15–18, 20–21, 29, 55, 67–68	12
Ambassidae		
<i>Ambassis</i> sp. 1	16, 18–24, 26–29, 43, 45–51, 53–56, 61, 64–66	28
<i>Ambassis</i> sp. 2	2–6, 9–13, 15–17, 20, 23, 33, 35, 45, 54, 58, 67–68	22
Apogonidae		
<i>Glossamia aprion</i> (Richardson, 1842)	1–2, 7, 10, 15–20, 26, 28–29, 33, 56, 58, 67–69	19
Toxotidae		
<i>Toxotes</i> sp.	1–7, 10, 12, 15–18, 26, 28–29, 32–34, 40, 42–46, 49, 54, 57, 67–68	30
Teraponidae		
<i>Amniataba percoides</i> (Günther, 1864)	9, 16–20, 26, 28–29, 36, 38–46, 48–49, 53, 55, 60–61, 65, 67–68	28
<i>Hannia greenwayi</i> Vari, 1978	36–37, 40, 42, 45–46, 61, 66–67	9
<i>Hephaestus jenkinsi</i> (Whitley, 1945)	3, 16, 18, 25–26, 28, 31–32, 34, 38, 40, 42, 44–46, 48–49, 53, 57, 61, 65–68	24
<i>Leiopotherapon unicolor</i> (Günther, 1859)	1–26, 28–43, 45–54, 56–68	65
Eleotridae		
<i>Hypseleotris kimberleyensis</i> Hoese and Allen, 1983	53, 65	2
<i>Mogurnda oligolepis</i> Allen and Jenkins, 1999	53, 61, 66	3
<i>Oxyeleotris selheimi</i> (Macleay, 1884)	10, 17, 22, 29, 33, 36, 40, 43, 48–49, 55	11
Gobiidae		
<i>Glossogobius giuris</i> (Hamilton, 1822)	2–5, 7–8, 16, 18–20, 23, 26–29, 32–33, 36–46, 48, 54–55, 57–59, 66–68	38

effective as gill nets or hook and line for capturing larger species (e.g. barramundi, lesser salmon catfish and freshwater sawfish). Thus, estimates of relative abundance could not be standardised for all sites.

Aboriginal names for the fish

During and after field trips, linguists from the KLRC and KLC consulted Bunuba, Gooniyandi, Ngarinyin, Nyikina and Walmajarri language speakers from communities of the Fitzroy River valley. Where possible, traditional owners were consulted in the field using live fishes, however it was also necessary to show photographs of species that were not captured on specific field trips. Fish names were recorded, wherever possible, for each of the species captured.

RESULTS

Environmental variables

The mean pH of the sites sampled (Appendix 1, Figure 1) was 8.17 (\pm 0.085 s.e.) and ranged from 6.8 to 10.6. With the exception of one site, all sites sampled were alkaline. The water temperatures of the sites sampled ranged from 15.1 to 33.0 °C and had a mean of 26.8 °C (\pm 0.68 s.e.). The coldest site

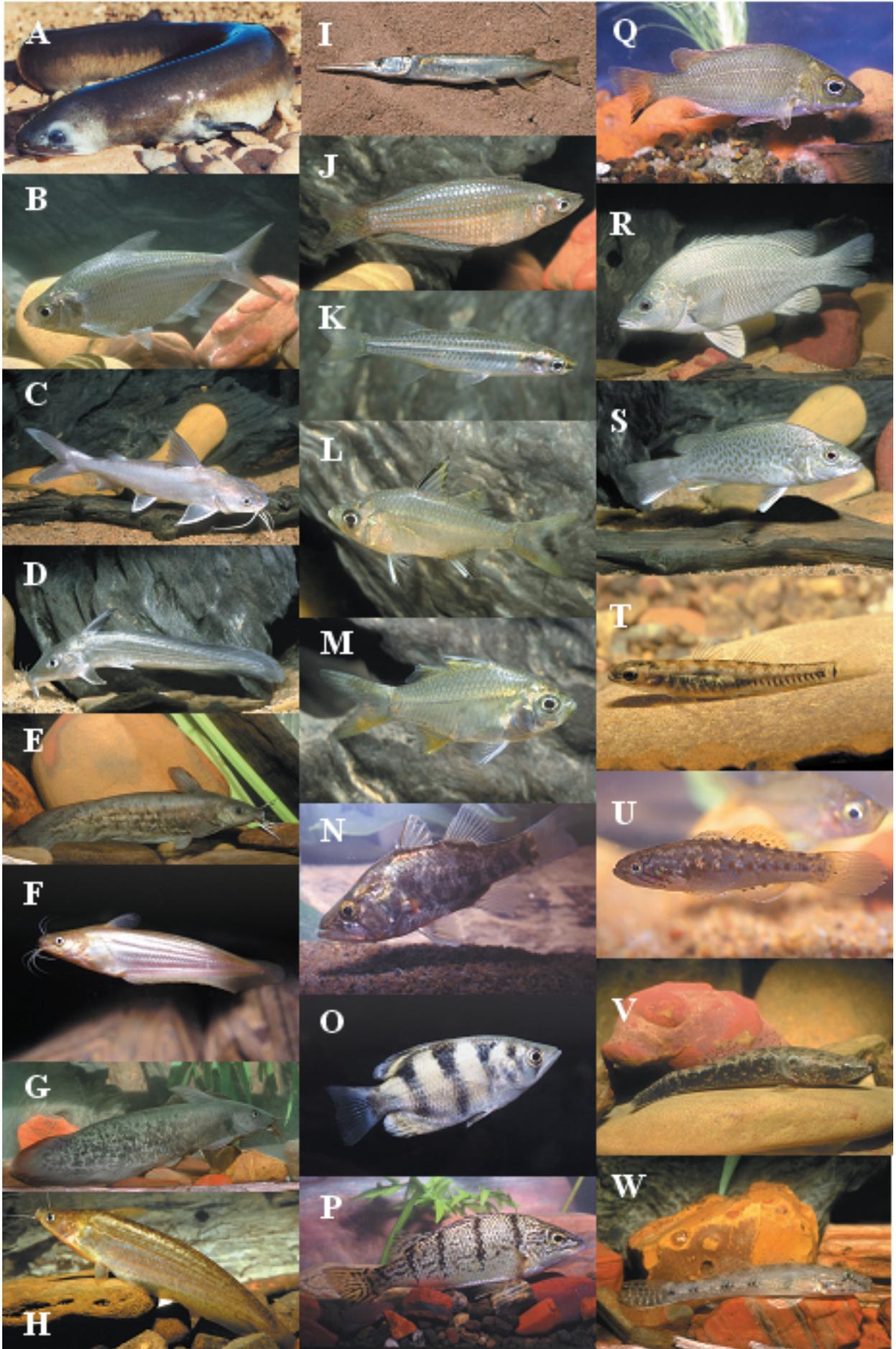
(site 64), which was sampled in June, was in the Hann River. With the exception of the estuarine site (Telegraph Pool, site 69), which was 6 ppt (\sim 9 mScm⁻¹), and Manguel Creek (site 11), which had a salinity of 19.4 ppt, all sites sampled were freshwater. The mean conductivity of all other sites was 0.89 mScm⁻¹ (\pm 0.383 s.e.).

Fish species captured

The 70 sample sites (Appendix 1, Figure 1) in the Fitzroy River yielded a total of 37 species in 31 genera from 23 families (Plates 1 and 2, Tables 1 and 2). Of these, 23 species are primarily freshwater fishes, while 14 species are considered of estuarine or marine origin but may spend part of their life-cycle in the freshwaters. For the purposes of this paper, a freshwater species is defined as one that is either restricted to freshwater, breeds in freshwater or spends the majority of their life-cycle in freshwater. Marine and estuarine species are defined as those that sometimes penetrate freshwaters, but predominantly occur and/or breed in marine or estuarine environs. An exception should be noted, that being the short-finned eel (*Anguilla bicolor*), which breeds in the sea, but was included in the freshwater category as it spends the majority of its life in freshwaters. The lesser salmon catfish (*Arius graeffei*), which is found in both fresh

Table 2 The sites at which the different marine/estuarine fish species were captured in the freshwaters of the Fitzroy River (see Figure 1 for site localities and Table 4 for common and Aboriginal names).

Marine/estuarine species	Site numbers captured at	Total
Carcharhinidae		
<i>Carcharhinus leucas</i> (Valenciennes, 1839)	57, 69, 70	3
Pristidae		
<i>Pristis microdon</i> Latham, 1794	3–4, 20, 34, 40–41, 57, 68–70	9
<i>Pristis clavata</i> Garman, 1906	69	1
Dasyatidae		
<i>Himantura chaophraya</i> Monkolpraist and Roberts, 1990	57, 69, 70	3
Elopidae		
<i>Megalops cyprinoides</i> (Broussonet, 1782)	2, 18–19, 40, 68	5
Mugilidae		
<i>Liza subviridis</i> (Valenciennes, 1836)	1–4, 9, 32, 34, 40, 69	9
<i>Liza alata</i> (Steindachner, 1892)	33, 68	2
Centropomidae		
<i>Lates calcarifer</i> (Bloch, 1790)	2–4, 9, 18, 26, 28–29, 32, 34, 36, 40–41, 43, 45, 57, 67–70	20
Gerreidae		
<i>Gerres filamentosus</i> Cuvier, 1829	32	1
<i>Gerres subfasciatus</i> Cuvier, 1830	9	1
Sciaenidae		
<i>Nibeas squamosa</i> Sasaki, 1992	34	1
Scatophagidae		
<i>Scatophagus argus</i> (Linnaeus, 1766)	7	1
<i>Selenotoca multifasciata</i> (Richardson, 1846)	3–4, 32	3
Tetraodontidae		
<i>Marilyna meraukensis</i> (de Beaufort, 1955)	32, 34, 69	3



and salt waters, has also been included in the freshwater category because it breeds in freshwater.

Of the 23 species of principally freshwater fishes (Table 1, Plate 1) recorded during the survey, the families Plotosidae (eel-tailed catfishes), Terapontidae (grunters) and Eleotridae (gudgeons) were best represented with five, four and three species recorded, respectively. A number of 'ecological generalist' species were found to be widespread throughout the various broad habitat types. These included the spangled perch (*Leiopotherapon unicolor*) (recorded at 65 of 70 sites), western rainbowfish (*Melanotaenia australis*) (56 of 70 sites) and bony bream (*Nematalosa erebi*) (49 of 70 sites). Other species, including the black catfish (*Neosilurus ater*) (recorded at one site), Barnett River gudgeon (*Hypseleotris kimberleyensis*) (two sites), false-spotted gudgeon (*Mogurnda oligolepis*) (three sites), Greenway's grunter (*Hannia greenwayi*) (nine sites) and false-spined catfish (*Neosilurus pseudospinosus*) (five sites) were rare with restricted distributions in the upper reaches and headwaters of the Fitzroy River catchment. A number of species were found in moderate numbers but only in the lower and middle reaches of the main river channel, including toothless catfish (*Anodontiglanis dahli*), Rendahl's catfish (*Porochilus rendahli*) and Prince Regent hardyhead (*Craterocephalus lentiginosus*). The short-finned eel (*Anguilla bicolor*) was only recorded at one site, but this species is secretive and difficult to capture, therefore it may be more common and widespread than indicated by the results of this survey. Two glassfishes (Ambassidae) (*Ambassis* sp. 1 and *Ambassis* sp. 2) do not conform to any keys and show sufficient morphological differences to the described species to warrant species recognition. These species are currently being described by the senior author. Furthermore, one undescribed species of archerfish (Toxotidae, *Toxotes* sp.) was captured throughout the river and is currently being described by Dr G. Allen.

Of the 14 fish species considered to be estuarine/marine opportunists captured in the freshwaters of the Fitzroy River (Table 2, Plate 2), most were found in small numbers only in the lower reaches of the main river channel (e.g. dwarf sawfish (*Pristis clavata*), mullets (*Liza* spp.), whipfin silverbidy (*Gerres filamentosus*), roach (*Gerres subfasciatus*), scaly croaker (*Nibea squamosa*), spotted scat (*Scatophagus argus*), striped butterfish (*Selenotoca multifasciata*)

and Merauke toadfish (*Marilyna meraukensis*)). However, barramundi (*Lates calcarifer*) were collected in moderate numbers throughout the main river channel and major tributaries up to ~ 400 km inland. Other species that were captured well upstream of the estuary, albeit in small numbers, were the bull shark (*Carcharhinus leucas*), freshwater sawfish (*Pristis microdon*), freshwater whipray (*Himantura chaophraya*), tarpon (*Megalops cyprinoides*) and greenback mullet (*Liza subviridis*).

Other species that were captured in the greater estuary of the Fitzroy River (i.e. King Sound), including Doctors Creek (Figure 1) are: the northern river shark (*Glyphis* sp. C), the milk shark (*Rhizoprionodon acutus* (Rüppell, 1837)), the winghead shark (*Eusphyra blochii* (Cuvier, 1816)), the dwarf sawfish (*Pristis clavata*), the lesser salmon catfish (*Arius graeffei*), shark mullet (*Rhinomugil nasutus* (De Vis, 1883)), king threadfin (*Polydactylus macrochir* (Günther, 1867)), scaly croaker (*Nibea squamosa*) and milk-spotted toadfish (*Chelonodon patoca* (Hamilton, 1822)). The northern river shark (*Glyphis* sp. C), which was captured in Doctors Creek, is extremely rare, and has not previously been recorded from Western Australia. It was previously known only from a few specimens collected in the Adelaide, East Alligator and South Alligator rivers in the Northern Territory and from the Fly River in Papua New Guinea (Taniuchi *et al.*, 1991; Compagno and Niem, 1998; Thorburn *et al.*, 2003; Museum and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory records).

Spatial distribution of fish species in the Fitzroy River

Localised fish communities in the Fitzroy River were shown to vary significantly ($p < 0.001$) between the upper, lower and middle reaches of the main channel/major tributaries (Table 3, Figure 1). These differences can largely be attributed to the higher occurrence of marine species in the lower and, to a lesser extent, middle reaches of the river, as well as to the disparity in species diversity between the lower (27 species), middle (22 species) and upper (17 species) reaches. Furthermore, ANOSIM suggested that the fish fauna associated with the smaller tributary sites and the upper Hann River gorge sites is significantly different to those in each of the lower, middle and upper riverine sites as well as the larger billabongs ($p < 0.008$). The gorge and

◀ **Plate 1** The freshwater fish species of the Fitzroy River, Western Australia. A. *Anguilla bicolor*. B. *Nematalosa erebi*. C. *Arius graeffei*. D. *Anodontiglanis dahli*. E. *Neosilurus ater*. F. *Neosilurus hyrtlii*. G. *Neosilurus pseudospinosus*. H. *Porochilus rendahli*. I. *Strongylura krefftii*. J. *Melanotaenia australis*. K. *Craterocephalus lentiginosus*. L. *Ambassis* sp.1. M. *Ambassis* sp.2. N. *Glossamia aprion*. O. *Toxotes* sp. P. *Amniataba percoides*. Q. *Hannia greenwayi*. R. *Hephaestus jenkinsi*. S. *Leiopotherapon unicolor*. T. *Hypseleotris kimberleyensis*. U. *Mogurnda oligolepis*. V. *Oxyeleotris selheimi*. W. *Glossogobius giuris*. Photographs: D. Morgan (A, F, I, N-Q, U) and M. Allen (B-E, G-H, J-M, R-S, V-W).

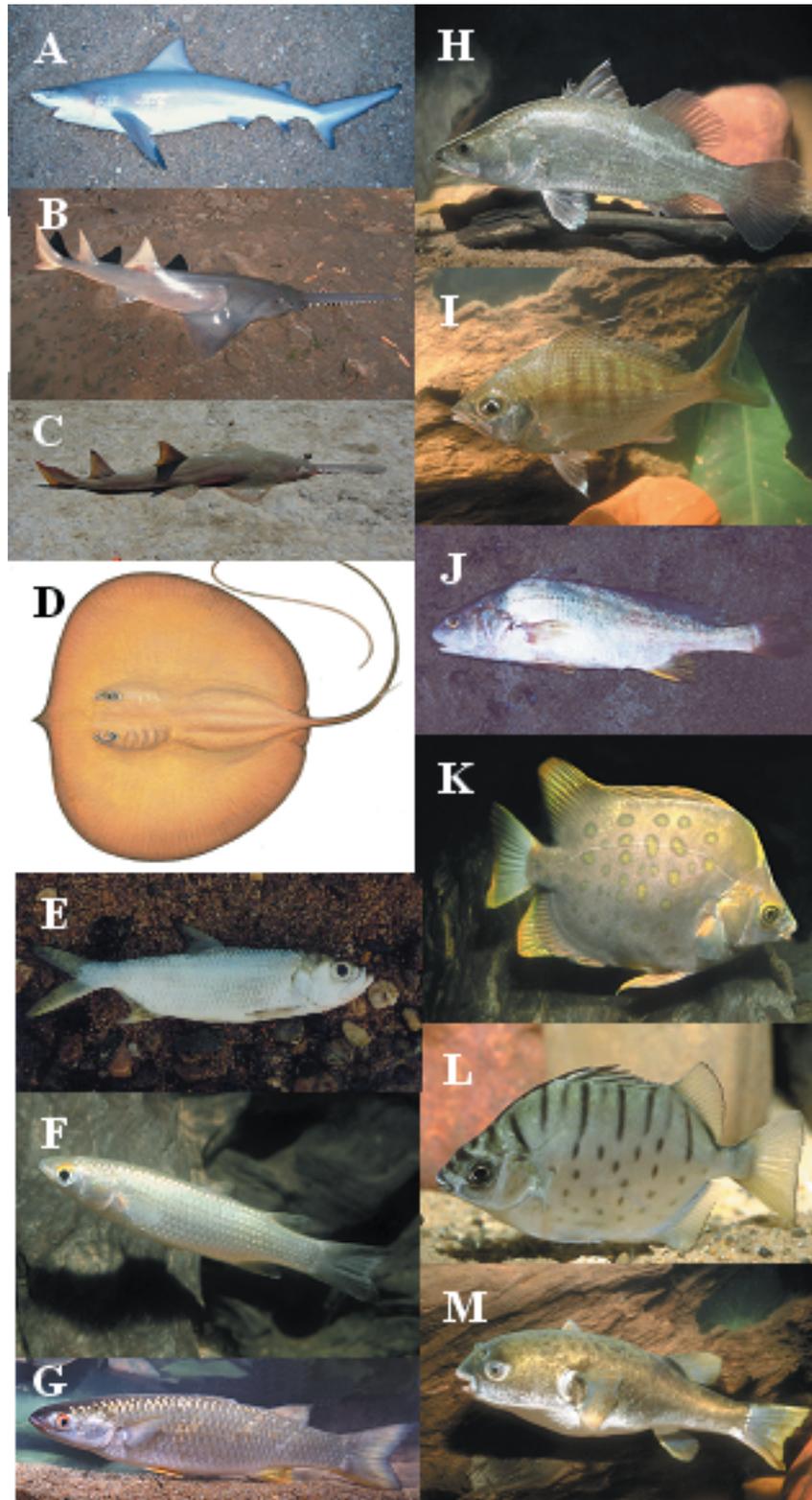


Plate 2 The marine/estuarine fish species found in the freshwaters of the Fitzroy River, Western Australia. A. *Carcharinus leucas*. B. *Pristis microdon*. C. *Pristis clavata*. D. *Himantura chaophraya*. E. *Megalops cyprinoides*. F. *Liza subviridis*. G. *Liza alata*. H. *Lates calcarifer*. I. *Gerres filamentosus*. J. *Nibea squamosa*. K. *Scatophagus argus*. L. *Selenotoca multifasciata*. M. *Marilynna meraukensis*. Not shown is *Gerres subfasciatus*. Photographs: D. Morgan (A-B, E, G, J), M. Allen (F, H-I, K-M), D. Thorburn (C) and J. Ruse (D).

Table 3 R-stat values for pairwise ANOSIM comparisons of the fish assemblages captured in the different regions/habitats of the Fitzroy River. N.B. Significant faunal differences are represented by * $P < 0.01$ and ** $P < 0.001$. Global R = 0.343.

Region	LOWER	MIDDLE	UPPER	TRIBUTARY	BILLABONG
MIDDLE	0.326**	–	–	–	–
UPPER	0.516**	0.323**	–	–	–
TRIBUTARY	0.393**	0.408**	0.355**	–	–
BILLABONG	0.435**	0.016	0.503*	0.284*	–
GORGE	0.781**	0.531**	0.551**	0.011	0.572*

tributary sites are generally dominated by smaller freshwater species, e.g. western rainbowfish (*M. australis*), spangled perch (*L. unicolor*), glassfish (*Ambassis* spp.), barred grunter (*Amniataba percoides*), bony bream (*N. erebi*) (and also the rarer species in the gorges such as the Barnett River gudgeon (*H. kimberleyensis*) and false-spotted gudgeon (*Mogurnda oligolepis*)), but lack the marine species and the lesser salmon catfish (*A. graeffei*). The larger billabongs were significantly different to all other major habitat sites with the exception of those in the middle river.

Aboriginal names for the fish

The Aboriginal names (for five languages) for the majority of fishes of the Fitzroy River are presented in Tables 4 and 5. The absence of a few names attests to either the rarity of some of the freshwater species (e.g. Barnett River gudgeon and Greenway's grunter) and the restriction of some of the marine/estuarine species to the lower catchment (Nyikina land) (e.g. whipfin silver-biddy, roach, scaly croaker, spotted scat, striped butterflyfish and Merauke toadfish).

DISCUSSION

Fish fauna of the Fitzroy River

The importance of fish faunal surveys, particularly in northern Western Australia, is highlighted when considering the results of this study. For example, not only is the reporting of two undescribed species (i.e. *Ambassis* sp. 1 and *Ambassis* sp. 2) a major finding of this study, but the new records and range extensions of nine species in the west Kimberley attests to the necessity for such studies. The following range extensions were made during this project:

- (1) Short-finned eels (*A. bicolor*) were not previously known from the Fitzroy River but have previously been found in the northern Pilbara and western Kimberley (Morgan *et al.*, 2003, Western Australian Museum records).
- (2) Black catfish (*N. ater*) were not previously known from the Fitzroy River catchment,

their only confirmed habitat in the Fitzroy River is at Dimond Gorge.

- (3) False-spine catfish (*N. pseudospinosus*) in the Fitzroy River was previously only known from Manning Creek (Barnett River) (Allen and Feinberg, 1998) – now extended to include the Mary, Margaret and O'Donnell rivers.
- (4) Greenway's grunter (*H. greenwayi*) was known only from the Hann and Isdell rivers, and has only been collected on two previous occasions (Allen and Allen, unpublished data; Rosen, Nelson and Butler in 1969 for the American Museum of Natural History) – now extended to include the Fitzroy, Margaret, Mary, Forest and Adcock rivers.
- (5) False-spotted gudgeons (*M. oligolepis*) in the Fitzroy River were not previously known from the Adcock River (see Figure 1).
- (6) *Glyphis* sp. C, which we captured in Doctor's Creek and is an undescribed spartooth shark that is listed as *Endangered* by Environment Australia, had not previously been recorded in Western Australia and is only known from a few specimens captured in the Adelaide, East Alligator and South Alligator rivers in the Northern Territory and the Fly River in New Guinea (Taniuchi *et al.*, 1991; Compagno and Niem, 1998; Thorburn *et al.*, 2003; Museum and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory records).
- (7) Dwarf sawfish (*P. clavata*) was not known from the west Kimberley.
- (8) Scaly croaker (*N. squamosa*) had not previously been recorded in the west Kimberley, although the Western Australian Museum records include a photograph from the northern Kimberley (Hutchins, pers. comm.) and Hutchins (2001) lists the species in the collections of the Western Australian Museum. Allen *et al.* (2002) describes the distribution of this species as being from the Victoria River (NT) east to the Norman River (QLD).
- (9) Merauke toadfish (*M. meraukensis*) was not previously known to occur west of the Prince Regent River (Allen *et al.*, 2002).

Table 4 The Aboriginal names for the different freshwater fish species in the Fitzroy River.

Freshwater species	Common name	Bunuba	Gooniyandi	Ngarinyin	Nyikina	Walmajarri
<i>Anguilla bicolor</i>	Indian short-finned eel	Lanyi	-	-	-	-
<i>Nematalosa erebi</i>	bony bream	Laarri	Laarri	Gunangurri	Bardijarr oobanyba	Lakarr
<i>Arius graeffei</i>	lesser salmon catfish	Mulurra	Gooloomangarri	Moolirr	Barooloo	Kulamajarti
<i>Anodontiglanis dahli</i>	toothless catfish	Wajuna	Wirlingirri	Ganangad	-	-
<i>Neosilurus ater</i>	black catfish	Manambu	-	-	Wardoo	Jungkali
<i>Neosilurus hyrtlui</i>	Hyrtl's tandan	Junggali	Joonggali	Walaman	Wirlinyboo	Jungkali
<i>Neosilurus pseudospinosus</i>	false-spine catfish	Manambu	-	-	Wardoo	Jungkali
<i>Porochilus rendahli</i>	Rendahli's catfish	Junggali	Joonggali	Walaman	Wirlinyboo	Jungkali
<i>Strongylura krefftii</i>	freshwater longtom	Langgarany	Langgaranyi	Biyira	Baloon	Langariny
<i>Melanotaenia australis</i>	western rainbowfish	Walmarri	Walmadi	Gooljirimby	Dookool koodany	-
<i>Craterocephalus lentiginosus</i>	Prince Regent hardyhead	Jinbirri	Thinbidi	-	Karlanyjarr	Jinpirr
<i>Ambassis</i> sp. 1	glassfish	Walmarri	Walmadi	Wolaman	Jilbirr	Jinpirr
<i>Ambassis</i> sp. 2	glassfish	Walmarri	Walmadi	Wolaman	Jilbirr	Jinpirr
<i>Glossamia aprion</i>	mouth almighty	Thamali	Thamarli	Damari	Jarbarr	Parlkamarnu
<i>Toxotes</i> sp.	Kimberley archerfish	Girrwali	Girrwali	Nalawarr	Marrbawool	Marrparl marrpal
<i>Amniataba percoides</i>	barred grunter	Walarrabu	Jarlandi	Birlirndirr	Mook mook	Kalirrikalirri
<i>Hannia greenwayi</i>	Greenway's grunter	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Hephaestus jenkinsi</i>	black bream	Walngga	Jambinbaroo	Emana	Walnga	Jampinyparu
<i>Leiopotherapon unicolor</i>	spangled perch	Bunda	Boornda	Wunggari	Jarrmoongka	Punta mangu
<i>Hypseleotris kimberleyensis</i>	Barnett River gudgeon	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Mogurnda oligolepis</i>	false-spotted gudgeon	Luthu	Loothoo	Nyagurlman	-	-
<i>Oxyeleotris selheimi</i>	giant gudgeon	Nyaguna	Nyagoorna	Nyagurlman	Loojoo	-
<i>Glossogobius giuris</i>	flathead goby	Nyaguna	-	Ngagulnun	Joolany	Luthu

Table 5 The Aboriginal names for the different marine/estuarine fish species in the Fitzroy River.

Freshwater species	Common name	Bunuba	Gooniyandi	Ngarinyin	Nyikina	Walmajarri
<i>Carcharhinus leucas</i>	bull shark	Ngan.gu	-	-	Ngawoonkoo	Ngangu
<i>Pristis microdon</i>	freshwater sawfish	Galwany	Galwany	-	Wirridanyiny	Wirrdani
<i>Pristis clavata</i>	dwarf sawfish	Galwany	Galwany	-	Wirridanyiny	Wirrdani
<i>Himantura chaophraya</i>	freshwater whipray	Baya gawiy	-	-	Biya	Biya
<i>Megalops cyprinoides</i>	Ox-eye herring, tarpon	-	Wayoo	-	Karlanyjarri	-
<i>Liza subviridis</i>	greenback mullet	-	Goolgara	Bulurrngari	Lawoorrynji	-
<i>Liza alata</i>	diamond mullet	-	Goolgara	Bulurrngari	Lawoorrynji	-
<i>Lates calcarifer</i>	barramundi	Balga	Barlga	Deyo	Birloonkoordany	Murrulpal
<i>Gerres filamentosus</i>	whipfin silver-biddy	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Gerres subfasciatus</i>	roach	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Nibeas squamosa</i>	scaly croaker	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Scatophagus argus</i>	spotted scat	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Selenotoca multifasciata</i>	striped butterfish	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Marilyna meraukensis</i>	Merauke toadfish	-	-	-	-	-

The 37 species of fish captured from the Fitzroy River during this study includes 23 freshwater species and 14 marine species that utilise the freshwaters. In addition to this, Allen and Leggett (1990) reported the strawman (*Craterocephalus stramineus* (Whitley, 1950) = *Quirichthys stramineus*) in the upper reaches of the Mary River (18°42'S, 125°45'E). Allen *et al.* (2002) list the seven-spot archerfish (*Toxotes chatareus* (Hamilton, 1922)) and Allen *et al.* (2002) and Doupé and Lenanton (1998) list the silver cobbler (*Arius midgleyi* Kailola and Pierce, 1988) from the Fitzroy River, however there are no specimens of these species in the WA Museum and it is unlikely that they are found in the Fitzroy River. The WA Museum however, has records of two other marine species from the lower non-tidal freshwaters of the river, i.e. giant herring (*Elops hawaiiensis* Regan, 1909) and the anchovy (*Thryssa aesturia* (Ogilby, 1910)). Thus, the known species that are found in the non-tidal freshwaters of the Fitzroy River can be put at 40 species (24 freshwater and 16 marine/estuarine). This diversity is high by Western Australian standards, with the total number of freshwater species being marginally higher than that recorded for all rivers of the Pilbara (Indian Ocean Drainage Division, 12 species) and south-west (South-west Coast Drainage Division, 10 species) combined (Morgan *et al.*, 1998, 2003; Allen *et al.*, 2002). The Kimberley as a whole is diverse in terms of freshwater fish species, and this survey confirms the Fitzroy River as one of the most species-rich in the region. For example, surveys within the Kimberley by McKay (1971) listed 17 freshwater species from the Ord River, while Allen (1975) identified 18 freshwater species from the Prince Regent River and seven from the Roe River, Hutchins (1977) collected 19 freshwater species from each of Drysdale and Carson rivers (total = 24 sp.) and Hutchins (1981) collected nine freshwater species from the Mitchell River. There is however, likely to be a similar number of freshwater species in the Ord River, with recent surveys by Doupé *et al.* (2003) capturing 19 species in Lake Kununurra and G. Allen and M. Allen (unpublished data) recording one other species in the lake in their total of 12 species. Allen *et al.* (2002) lists a further four freshwater species for the Ord River, taking the known total to 24 species. Within the Northern Territory Pollard (1974) collected 28 freshwater fishes from the East Alligator River and also identified a further 15 predominantly marine species, the majority of which were also captured in the Fitzroy River. Pollard (1974) also included the Aboriginal (Oenpelli) names for many of the species. Bishop *et al.* (2001) listed 37 freshwater fishes from the Alligator Rivers (East and South).

Approximately two-thirds of Australia's 200 freshwater fish species occur within northern Australia and within the Kimberley there are

approximate 50 species of which 18 are endemic (Allen and Leggett, 1990; Allen *et al.*, 2002). The high endemism of the Kimberley is probably a consequence of the rugged topography and diverse habitats that have acted as isolating mechanisms and have thus enhanced speciation (Allen and Leggett, 1990; Pusey *et al.*, 1995). The high diversity of the Fitzroy River may be both a factor of the large catchment size (e.g. Pusey and Kernard (1996) demonstrated a positive relationship between species richness and catchment area in North Queensland) and the high degree of variable habitats, particularly when comparing the main channel, billabongs and creek systems of the floodplain to the high relief gorge country of the headwaters. The topography of the upper Hann River appears to have had a major influence in governing the evolution of at least a few species, e.g. Barnett River gudgeon (*H. kimberleyensis*) and Greenway's grunter (*H. greenwayi*). Freshwater fishes endemic to the Fitzroy River include: *H. kimberleyensis*, *H. greenwayi* (also found in the Isdell River (Allen and Allen, unpublished data)) and possibly the two undescribed glassfishes (*Ambassis* sp. 1 and sp. 2) and archerfish (*Toxotes* sp.). The absence of a number of species that are endemic to nearby, more northern Kimberley rivers, e.g. five species of Terapontidae (*Hephaestus epirrhinos* Vari and Hutchins, 1978, *Leiopotherapon macrolepis* Vari, 1978, *Syncomistes kimberleyensis* Vari, 1978, *Syncomistes rastellus* Vari and Hutchins, 1978 and *Syncomistes trigonicus* Vari, 1978), four eleotrids (*Hypseleotris ejuncida* Hoese and Allen, 1983, *Hypseleotris regalis* Hoese and Allen, 1983, *Kimberleyeleotris hutchinsi* Hoese and Allen, 1987 and *Kimberleyeleotris notata* Hoese and Allen, 1987), one Atherinidae (*Craterocephalus helenae* Ivantsoff, Crowley and Allen, 1987) and two species of the Melanotaeniidae (*Melanotaenia gracilis* Allen, 1978 and *Melanotaenia pygmaea* Allen, 1974), suggests that these species have evolved in these remote, more northern rivers of the Kimberley and that there has been no recent connection between these rivers and the Fitzroy River.

The notable change in fish faunal assemblages throughout the Fitzroy River is highlighted by the fact that there are significant differences in the fish fauna found in the lower, middle and upper main channel and major tributary sites of the Fitzroy River as well as between these sites and the smaller less permanent tributaries on the floodplain and in the upper Hann River. Within the Fitzroy River there is a notable increase in species richness in the lower reaches of the river compared to the headwater streams. For example, 27 species were captured in the lower reaches, 22 in the middle and 17 in the upper reaches of the main channel and major tributaries, while the smaller tributary and upper Hann River sites contained 18 and 13 species,

respectively, and 19 species were captured from the major billabongs of the river.

Aboriginal values of the Fitzroy River

The Bunuba, Gooniyandi, Ngarinyin, Nyikina and Walmajarri people have strong economic, cultural and religious affiliations with the fish, the river and fishing. Fishing is an integral part of life for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people of the Fitzroy River catchment, which is not surprising considering that throughout most of its length large numbers of important food species, e.g. black bream (*H. jenkinsi*), barramundi (*L. calcarifer*) and lesser salmon catfish (*A. graeffei*) are readily captured. The utilisation of live and fresh bait has also led to a good understanding of the smaller species in the river.

Not only are the river, its tributaries, billabongs and large and small pools important for food, but they are extremely valuable from a cultural perspective. For example, many of the sites sampled during this survey, particularly permanent deep pools in gorges and billabongs, are known as 'Living Waters'. They are home to Creator 'snakes' that must be treated with ritual and respect to maintain water flows, renew aquatic life and ensure human welfare. The floodplain environment and riparian zone of the Fitzroy River valley is also important for hunting. Stock on pastoral leases readily accesses the river along most of its length.

The Kimberley Land Council and the Kimberley Language Resource Centre have a wealth of information regarding many aspects of the cultural beliefs and languages of the people of the Fitzroy River. A great deal of language was recorded during these field trips by the KLRC.

Impacts of a dam on the Fitzroy River

While providing water for agriculture and domestic uses, the proposed dam sites in the Fitzroy River have also been seen as a means of controlling natural flooding in the Fitzroy River, thereby allowing intensive agriculture to be developed as in the case of the lower Ord River (Anon, 1993). A dam would create altered flow regimes and changes in seasonal distributions of flow downstream of the dam and there are uncertainties in relation to the river's hydrology relating to sediment loads, impacts of reduced flows and changes in downstream water quality (Ruprecht and Rodgers, 1998). The reduction in peak flow volumes if either Dimond Gorge or Margaret Gorge were dammed would be about one-third (Anon, 1993). However, while flow would be reduced during the wet, during the dry it would be increased to provide for downstream irrigation (Anon, 1993). The altered flow regimes of the river will inevitably cause a change in the prevailing fish fauna immediately above the dam, but will also

impact the distribution of fish below the dam. Thus migratory species such as barramundi, the endangered freshwater sawfish, ox-eye herring and mullets will no longer have access to habitat above dam sites, but the altered flow regimes and flood levels will also impact the recruitment of other species. The Fitzroy River acts as a nursery for many of these species and in the case of the freshwater sawfish, the river is currently the most important known refuge for the species (see Thorburn *et al.* 2003). Migratory species such as those listed above have been excluded from the Ord River above Lake Kununurra as a result of the diversion dam (Doupé *et al.*, 2003). During the wet season the floodplain environment of the lower Fitzroy is important not only as spawning grounds for many of the river's fishes, but is also likely to act as a nursery ground for many of these species. Any reduction in flooding may therefore inhibit larval recruitment into the adult populations of some species. Furthermore, dams generally favour species that prefer lentic waters over those more conducive to lotic habitats and ultimately alter fish community structure (e.g. Morgan *et al.*, 2002).

One of the proposed dam sites, Dimond Gorge, had the second highest number of species recorded (17) and was the only location where the black catfish (*N. ater*) was collected. Barramundi and the endangered freshwater sawfish are known to migrate at least as far upstream as these sites.

Grazing

Williams and Pen (1998) noted that much of the upper Fitzroy River catchment shows considerable signs of degradation through heavy grazing, with many large denuded and eroding areas. Much of the riparian zone shows signs of degradation from livestock, while many of the wetlands and billabongs become nutrient enriched and trampled by congregations of cattle during the dry. The trampling of small pools by cattle may impact on benthic species such as the gobies, gudgeons and plotosid catfishes, although further work is required to ascertain any impacts. As a precautionary measure, areas of important fish habitat should be identified and fenced from cattle, e.g. Lake Skeleton (site 10).

Conclusions

The species richness and uniqueness of the fish fauna of the Fitzroy River, its importance to the people of the west Kimberley for food and recreation, and the diverse significance of the river as a 'living cultural landscape' to Aboriginal people of the region (including the Bunuba, Gooniyandi, Ngarinyin, Nyikina and Walmajarri) makes it one of Australia's great river systems. The Fitzroy River and its estuary, which provides refuge for a number of rare and little known species (e.g. the endangered

freshwater sawfish, Greenway's grunter, Barnett River gudgeon, false-spotted gudgeon and three undescribed species), warrants careful consideration before any proposed land use changes are implemented.

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Appendix 1 The sites sampled in the Fitzroy River catchment.

Site Number	Site Locality	Site Number	Site Locality
1	Fitzroy River – Myroodah Crossing	34	Udialla Station – Fitzroy River
2	Minnie River	35	Leopold Station – Little Spring
3	Fitzroy River ~ 5 km downstream of Udialla Station	36	Mary River – <i>Yiyili</i> Community
4	Tributary Fitzroy River ~ 10km upstream Udialla Station	37	Margaret River, Me No Savy
5	Fitzroy River – upstream Udialla Station	38	Margaret River, <i>Joorda Dooghingi</i>
6	Manguel Creek	39	Margaret River, <i>Nyalingi</i>
7	Lake Alma	40	Margaret River, <i>Lambardi</i>
8	Geegully Creek	41	O'Donnell River / Margaret River junction, <i>Balmoonggoo</i>
9	Fitzroy River – opposite Minnie River mouth	42	Gorge near Margaret River, <i>Girramoo</i>
10	Lake Skeleton	43	Margaret River
11	Lake on Old Great Northern Hwy	44	Fitzroy River – Cadjeput – Old Mornington Station
12	Lake on Great Northern Hwy ~ 131km wets Fitzroy Crossing	45	Fitzroy River – Dimond Gorge
13	Mt Wynne Creek – Great Northern Hwy	46	Tributary of Dimond Gorge
14	Mt Hardman Creek – Great Northern Hwy	47	Small billabong – tributary of Dimond Gorge
15	Brooking Channel, <i>Baralwani</i> – Great Northern Hwy	48	Anna Creek – Old Mornington Station
16	Old Crossing – Fitzroy River	49	Anna Creek – Old Mornington Station
17	Brooking Creek – Geikie Gorge Rd	50	Adcock River – Old Mornington Station
18	Fitzroy River, Sheep Camp, <i>Wuruiya</i> – Geikie Gorge	51	Tributary of Adcock River
19	Crocodile Creek – Geikie Gorge	52	Grave Creek – Adcock River
20	<i>Wirangarra</i> ~ 20 km south Fitzroy Crossing	53	Manning Creek Gorge
21	Billabong near <i>Wirangarra</i> – small lake near <i>Ngurtawarta</i> community	54	Lower Fitzroy River – Small tributary of Willuns Pool
22	<i>Dawuwarriya</i> – near <i>Ngurtawarta</i> Community	55	Duck Hole Creek – <i>Goray</i>
23	Creek crossing – Geikie Gorge Rd	56	Duck Hole Billabong
24	Gurangajar Creek – Geikie Gorge Rd	57	Fitzroy River – Cherabin Camp
25	Two Mile Creek, <i>Barangarri</i>	58	Cherabin Creek – Crocodile Dam (stock dam)
26	<i>Goarrii</i> ~ 10km E Fitzroy Crossing off Great Northern Hwy	59	Booline Creek
27	Bluebush Creek ~ 15km E Fitzroy Crossing	60	Hann River, <i>Barlmundurra</i> – Gibb River Rd
28	Margaret River (Mayalnga) – crossing near <i>Muludja</i> Community	61	Hann River Gorge
29	<i>Jilyardi</i> (billabong near Bayulu community)	62	Hann River – Bella Yards
30	Mimbi Cave (Mt Pierre Station)	63	Snake Creek – Hann River
31	Christmas Creek – Bohemia Downs Station, <i>Kupartiya</i> Community)	64	Snake Creek, <i>Bijili</i> – Hann River
32	Fitzroy River – Willare Bridge	65	Barnett River – downstream of Barnett River Gorge
33	Udialla Station – spring near Oyster Patch	66	Adcock River Gorge
		67	Forest River – Jubilee Downs
		68	Snake Creek – Camballin
		69	Telegraph Pool – Fitzroy River
		70	Camballin – Fitzroy River