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Saibai and Boigu Rangers continue monitoring pest fish in Torres Strait

Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) Malu K'iai (Boigu) and Mura Buway (Saibai) Rangers are continuing to monitor the invasive Climbing Perch, locally known as Mabel wapi and which are known to live in PNG.

TSRA Chairperson, Mr Joseph Elu, said that while there was evidence the freshwater fish could tolerate exposure to salt water and potentially be a threat to local species, TSRA rangers are keeping a close eye on the situation.

“The fish drags itself from waterhole to waterhole and is very invasive, outcompeting native species once it is established in a new environment,” Mr Elu said.

“It is extremely hardy, and has been known to hibernate in the mud of dried-up creek beds for up to six months.

“We are working with James Cook University researchers to ensure they are eradicated from Boigu and Saibai islands where they have been found, and to safeguard against their movement to other areas of the Torres Strait.”

Community members are being asked to look out for other pest fish which could potentially arrive in the Torres Strait including pacu, snakehead and walking catfish, with information now being distributed on Boigu and Saibai in an effort to build awareness amongst the community.

“This invasive fish species has the ability to travel across land, breathing in air just like humans; and it has sharp spines on the side of its head and pectoral fins which it uses to walk along the ground,” Mr Elu said.

“These sharp spines can become lodged in the throat or stomach of larger animals, birds and fish when they eat Climbing Perch.

“The Mabel Wapi is pale brown-orange to dark greenish-brown with occasional dark blotches over the body and are 10-23 cm, but can grow up to 25 cm in length.”

Both the Malu K'iai and Mura Buway Rangers will continue to regularly net and monitor water holes for Climbing Perch and any other pest fish species and hold community meetings to discuss the results.

All community members across the Torres Strait are asked to report any unusual fish they catch or see to the rangers immediately.

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Caption: Mabel wapi (Climbing perch) can breathe air like humans on land (Image: Nathan Waltham, JCU)



Caption: Mura Buway Ranger Karl Tabuai casting for Mabel wapi (Image: Nathan Waltham, JCU)