

One of my favourite spots to fish since I was a kid has always been Lake Albert. In the last few seasons before it almost dried up, the Lake had the best freshwater fishing I have experienced. It wasn't uncommon to spend a few hours trolling and land up to twenty or thirty golden perch and Murray cod. Some of the cod were absolute monsters with Marty Asmus landing one of 122cm which is up there with the biggest cod I have seen alive or dead.

When the water evaporated and the fish started to die, it was disappointing to walk around the edge and see the fish dying in the shallows, knowing how long it had taken to get the fishery working so well.

NSW Fisheries saved approximately 200 fish of varied species through electrofishing and gill netting, but the feedback was that the electrofisher couldn't get current to flow through the fish due to the conductivity of the Lake's water and many more fish were stunned slightly and escaped, than what were captured.

I spoke a few times with the Council workers who each morning and night walked the bank picking up dead fish. I took interest in the fact that they only picked up small numbers of fish each day in comparison to what was captured on an average Sunday afternoon prior to the drought.

The pelicans made a big dent in the smaller fish (mainly carp, silver perch & golden perch), but there isn't a pelican big enough to swallow a 5kg cod or 2kg golden perch of which the Lake held large populations.

When it finally filled again and water flowed over the spillway, I joined with the kids catching carp with our hands as they skidded down the spillway. Some golden perch also slid down the concrete indicating that some survived the dry spell.

I have tried with rod and reel to assess what fish are left (with some success casting spinnerbaits when the Lake was overflowing) but with the water currently a chilly seven degrees it's difficult to get a bite at all.

Cod and golden perch have adapted to Australia's climate over thousands of years and I believe that the weak and old fish were the ones washed up on the shore. Natural selection has left the stronger fish behind. Hopefully Fisheries can top up fish numbers with re-stocking and we can get back this prized fishery back to what it was within a few years.

Jamin Forbes