



**FREE
NSW
GUIDE**

Go Freshwater Fishing



FEATURED LOCATION!

COPETON DAM

NSW INLAND HOTSPOT!

dpird.nsw.gov.au



Cover Image: Danielle Hall.

All images: Chris Cleaver.

Fish illustrations: Pat Tully.

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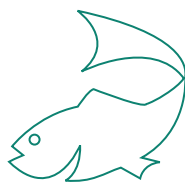
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Foreword

FROM DPIRD



Throwing a line in at a new spot always makes for a great fishing adventure, whether it's on a family holiday or just somewhere new close to home. No matter your fishing expertise, NSW boasts a wide range of fish species and great places to catch them, including in our many inland rivers, impoundments and streams as well as the productive estuaries, lakes, beaches and rocky headlands on the NSW coast. There are also many inshore and offshore fishing opportunities from your boat or if using one of the many experienced charter fishing services available.

There are many reasons to go fishing, including to unwind and relax, spend time with family and friends, enjoy nature and of course to catch a tasty meal of fresh fish. Over a million people in NSW enjoy this fantastic lifestyle and the great news is that you are never too old or young to take up fishing so get out there and give it a go! Getting into fishing is easy. If you don't know where to start, just head into your local tackle store where the friendly staff can provide tips on tackle, bait and techniques plus point you to a safe, convenient spot to throw a line in.

DPIRD has developed these *Go Fishing* guides as a snapshot of popular NSW fishing locations in both fresh and saltwater to help improve your recreational fishing experiences.

For more information on other locations, fish species, size and bag limits, permitted gear and other information not listed in these guides, visit the **DPIRD website** or download the **FishSmart app** to your mobile device.

The **FishSmart NSW app** provides recreational fishers 24/7 access to essential information on fishing in NSW.

Download the FishSmart NSW app to your mobile device.



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App Store



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Overview

Copeton Dam has earned a solid reputation among fishing enthusiasts as one of the premier destinations for catching large Murray cod in New South Wales.

Set against the stunning backdrop of pristine gorges and spread across approximately 900 hectares of rugged bushland on the western slopes of the New England Ranges, Copeton Dam offers scenery to match its fishing fame.

The dam is conveniently located between three towns: Inverell (40 km), Bundarra (26 km), and Bingara (55 km), with access available from all three.

Construction of Copeton Dam began in 1968, and it officially opened in 1973, primarily to supply irrigation water. When full, the dam holds a staggering 1,364,000 megalitres over three times the volume of Sydney Harbour. It spans more than 11,000 acres and reaches depths of up to 104 metres, with the dam wall itself standing 113 metres tall.

At extremely low water levels (below 3%), remnants of the old Dasey Town, including its church, become visible on the lakebed — an eerie and fascinating sight.

Beyond its recreational value, Copeton Dam plays a vital role in regional water supply, including for the city of Tamworth, and supports the largest pecan nut plantation in the Southern Hemisphere, located in the nearby Gwydir River Valley.

Water releases from the dam also serve a wide range of purposes, environmental flow management, hydro-electric power generation, flood mitigation, irrigation for crops such as cotton, lucerne, wheat, fruit trees, and vegetables, pasture support for sheep and cattle farming.

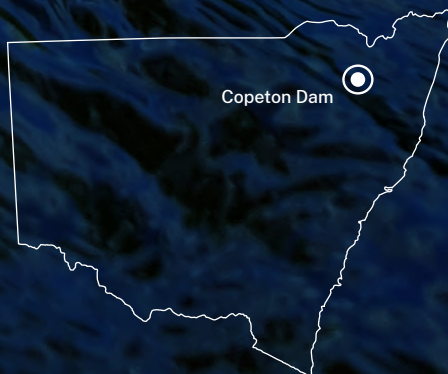
The area around the dam is known for its striking white granite boulders and thick wattle brush, which provide ideal structures for fish habitats. These spots are prime fishing locations, especially for Murray cod and golden perch, as well as eel-tailed catfish, silver perch, and spangled perch.

Even if the fishing is quiet, there's plenty to explore. When water levels permit, nearby gorges are accessible by boat and offer opportunities for wildlife watching. Keep an eye out for goats, deer, pigs, emus, and a diverse range of birdlife.

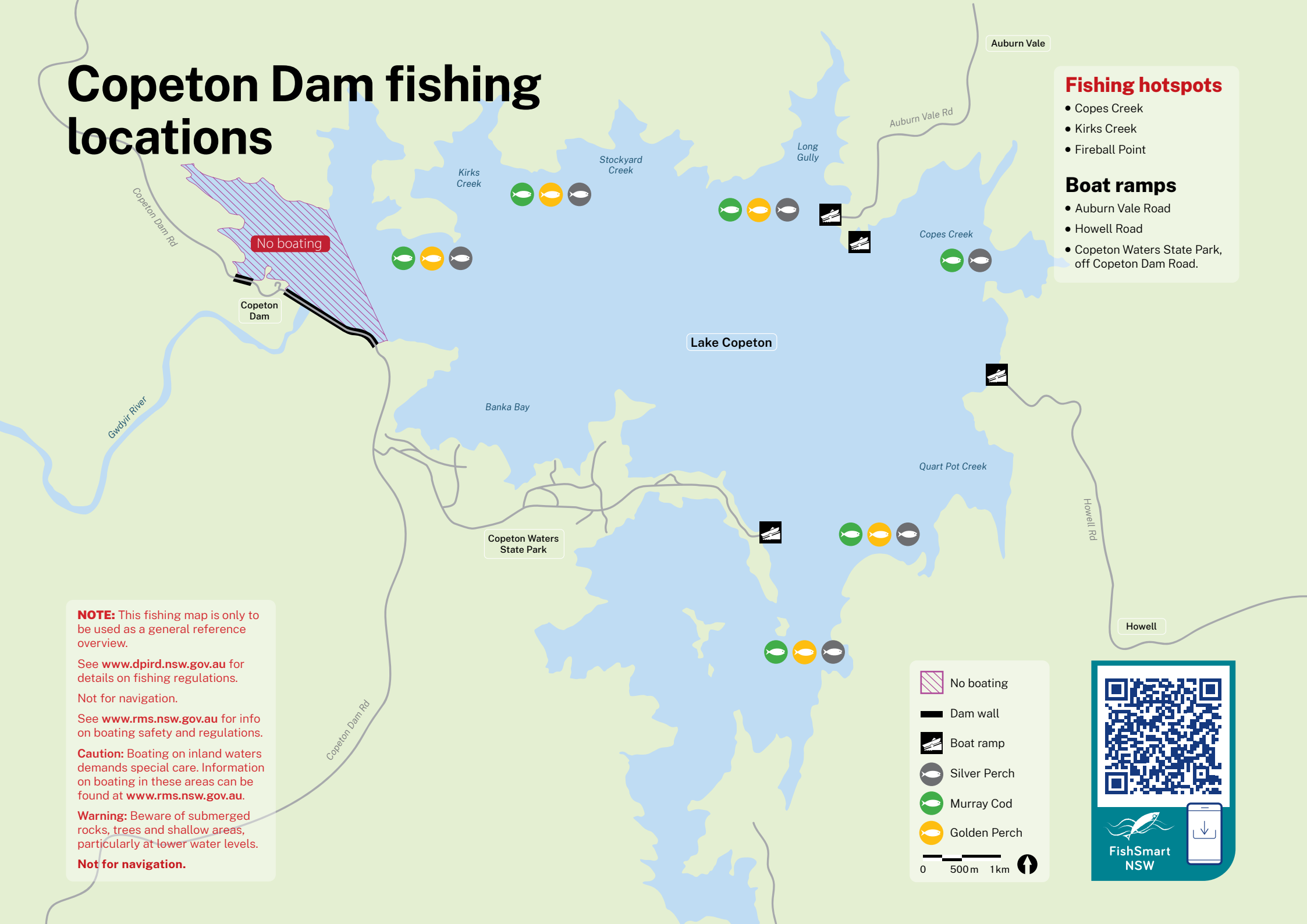
Accommodation is easy and flexible, with camping grounds and cabins available on both the northern and southern shores. Boat ramps and other facilities make it a convenient spot for extended stays.

Tip: If you're visiting in late autumn, winter, or early spring, be sure to pack warm clothing — the area can get quite cold in the evenings and early mornings, despite its northern location.

With year-round access and a wide variety of fishing and outdoor opportunities, Copeton Dam is an excellent destination for anglers of all skill levels. Hopefully, this guide helps you plan your next adventure to this iconic Australian fishing spot!



Copeton Dam fishing locations



Fishing hotspots

- Copes Creek
- Kirks Creek
- Fireball Point

Boat ramps

- Auburn Vale Road
- Howell Road
- Copeton Waters State Park, off Copeton Dam Road.

NOTE: This fishing map is only to be used as a general reference overview.

See www.dpi.nsw.gov.au for details on fishing regulations.

Not for navigation.

See www.rms.nsw.gov.au for info on boating safety and regulations.

Caution: Boating on inland waters demands special care. Information on boating in these areas can be found at www.rms.nsw.gov.au.

Warning: Beware of submerged rocks, trees and shallow areas, particularly at lower water levels.

Not for navigation.

Legend:

- No boating
- Dam wall
- Boat ramp
- Silver Perch
- Murray Cod
- Golden Perch

Scale: 0 500m 1km

QR code linking to FishSmart NSW app

FishSmart NSW

Key target species

Murray cod

PEAK SEASON:

April – August.

TECHNIQUE:

Bait fishing with large yabbies and grubs from the bank, especially at night; trolling hard-bodied deep diving lures in the 90–150 mm size range around rocky banks and sunken logs; casting large spinnerbaits and soft plastics (focus on steep rocky banks during summer and shallow grassy areas in the cooler months).

TACKLE:

Heavy 6–10 kg baitcaster outfits loaded with 15–24kg braided mainline with a rod length of 15–24 kg fluorocarbon leader. A large knotless landing net, gloves and heavy-duty pliers are important pieces of equipment to have onboard.

HOT SPOTS:

Kirk Hill, Fireball Point & Crown Jewel Hill.

CLOSED SEASON: Copeton Dam is exempt from the statewide Murray Cod closure from September 1 to November 30, all other regulations apply.





Golden perch

PEAK SEASON: Year-round, September to December renowned for trophy-sized specimens.

TECHNIQUE: Casting small lipless crankbaits, soft plastics and hard-bodied lures at standing trees, flooded banks and rocky points; trolling rocky points at a depth contour between 4-7 m with small hard-bodied lures measuring between 50-90 mm.

TACKLE: 2-4 kg spin outfits, 2.1m graphite rod, 2500 size spin reel, 4-5 kg braided mainline with a rod length of 4-5 kg fluorocarbon leader. Small soft plastics with 1/6-1/4 oz jighead and size 1 or 2 hook work well on golden perch.

HOT SPOTS: Copes Creek, Malacca Point & Kirks Creek.



Other species

Silver perch

Silver perch were once widespread and abundant throughout most of the Murray Darling Basin system; however, they have declined across most of their natural range over recent decades and are now classed as a “vulnerable species”.



Silver perch are a moderate to large native freshwater fish usually reaching 30–40cm in size and 0.5–1.5 kg in weight but have been recorded up to 8 kg. Silver perch fight hard and are a great sportfish and you don't need specialised gear. If casting for silver perch consider using small lures or even flies due to their small mouth size.

They aren't fussy eaters and take a range of baits. Earthworms, aquatic insects, shrimp, small yabbies, bread and even corn are well worth trying.

HOT SPOTS: Copes Creek & Kirks Creek.

Eel-tailed catfish

Catfish were native to the Gwydir River prior to the dam's construction and have a reputation for being great fighters. Given the opportunity, they will frequently chase down a lure intended for their bigger comrades that occupy the dam.



Catfish have a lot to offer for anglers; they fight well and are considered a good table fish. Catfish diets consist of yabbies, shrimps, molluscs and other aquatic organisms.

Live for Fishing. Fish for Life. Learn more at
WWW.DPI.NSW.GOV.AU/FISH-FOR-LIFE





FACT BOX

Correct handling

The trophy-sized Murray cod that inhabit Copeton Dam are a once-in-a-lifetime capture for most anglers. Looking after these great native sportfish is paramount to ensure their survival.

When landing cod, best practice is to use a large knotless net. Once the fish is in the net, leave it in the water until you have your brag mat, camera or other equipment ready. Never lay the fish on a hot boat deck and always wet the brag mat before laying a fish down to measure.

When handling large cod it is recommended to not use lip grips as this can cause damage to the fish's jaw, simply thumb grip the fish's lower jaw with a wet gloved hand.

Always support the weight of the fish with your second hand. When lifting,

always lift the fish horizontally – never put any pressure on the vertebrae behind the fish's head.

If your camera is immediately available, take a few quick pictures and then place the fish in the water until it is ready to swim away.

Some fishers even choose not to hold the fish and hop into the water with very large cod, this can make an amazing shot and memory plus a nice cool off in summer, however, in the frigid cold of winter it would not be recommended.

FACT BOX

Big Murray cod on soft plastics

In the past few years the technique of casting big soft plastics and swimbaits for Murray cod has really come to life in Copeton Dam. During winter the redfin and carp in the dam become active and are actively hunted by Murray cod across the shallower dam edges.

Large 150–200 mm soft plastics and jointed hardbody swimbaits that ideally represent the redfin and carp are perfect options for large cod.

The best locations include points and bays near the old river and creek beds and areas where you can see redfin and carp rising. Hold your boat well away from the bank in 5–7 m of water and cast towards the bank.

Fish the lure with a slow roll back to the boat, the odd pause can elicit a strike from a wary fish just following. Try to work your lure at varying depths and speeds each cast until you get a bite and repeat the retrieve that proved successful.

June, July and August are the best months for this technique.

Make sure you have a heavy rod to help with casting the large lures and to land the big fish. Make sure hooks, split rings and lures are strong as the bite from a big cod has immense power.

FACT BOX

Yabby fishing



FISHING RULES

To reduce the accidental capture of native species, only approved nets may be used in NSW waters. Since 2021, yabby traps (commonly known as “opera house” traps) have been banned, as they have been linked to the drowning of air-breathing animals such as platypus, turtles, and water rats.

Research shows that eco-friendly alternatives, such as open pyramid lift nets, are just as effective for catching yabbies without harming other wildlife. Using approved equipment not only protects native fauna but also supports better fishing practices and helps anglers comply with similar regulations across other states and territories.

These changes aim to improve the sustainability of aquatic resources and ensure long-term fishing opportunities for recreational fishers.

Open pyramid lift nets are permitted in all private waters and most public waters on both sides of the Great Dividing Range. Hoop nets or hand-hauled yabby nets may also be used in specific environments such as ground tanks, bore drains, or lagoons.

As noted, opera house traps are no longer allowed in any NSW waters due to their impact on non-target species. The NSW Government encourages fishers to dispose of these traps and switch to approved alternatives like open pyramid lift nets.

NOT PERMITTED: Opera house traps



Permitted*



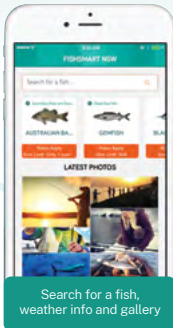
*A person can only use
up to 5 in total
- either one type or a
combination of both.

Check out the app: FishSmart



DPIRD has created an app that provides recreational fishers with 24/7 access to essential information they need to know to fish in NSW, such as:

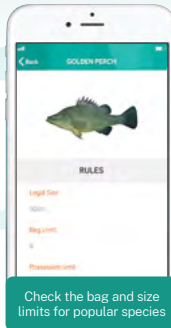
- a pictorial guide of common recreational species, bag & size limits, closed seasons and fishing gear rules
- real-time maps to locate nearest FADs (Fish Aggregation Devices), artificial reefs, Recreational Fishing Havens and Marine Park Zones
- local weather, tide, moon phase and barometric pressure to help choose best time to fish
- guides on spearfishing, fishing safely, trout fishing, regional fishing
- DPIRD contact for reporting



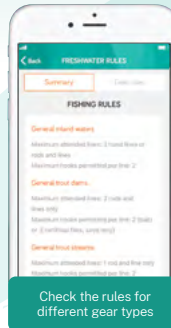
Search for a fish, weather info and gallery



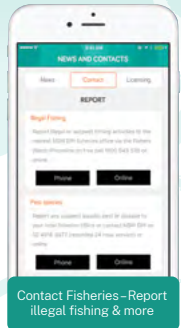
See your location in relation to FADs, Marine Park Zones, RFHs & more



Check the bag and size limits for popular species



Check the rules for different gear types



Contact Fisheries - Report illegal fishing & more



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